



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

at

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

for the period

JULY 2011 – JUNE 2012

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

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

The Board is specifically charged to:

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

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

- 1. Statutory Role of the IMB**
- 2. Contents**
- 3. Description of the Prison**
- 4. Executive Summary**
 - 4.1 Particular Issues requiring a Response
 - 4.2 Previous Year's Concerns
 - 4.3 Issues for Director/G4S
 - 4.4 Issues of Excellence not requiring a Response
 - 4.5 Overall Judgment
- 5. Areas that must be reported on:**
 - 5.1 Equality & Inclusion
 - 5.2 Education, Learning and Skills
 - 5.3 Healthcare and Mental Health
 - 5.4 Purposeful Activity
 - 5.5 Resettlement
 - 5.6 Safer Custody
 - 5.7 Segregation, Care and Separation
 - 5.8 Residential Services
- 6. Other Areas of the Prison Regime:**

Drug Strategy
- 7. The Work of the Independent Monitoring Board**

Board Statistics
Applications to the Board
Board Matters
Chair's Comments
- 8. Glossary of Establishment related Terms and Abbreviations used**

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

HMP Altcourse is situated six miles north of Liverpool city centre and is set in an 80 acre site surrounded by woodlands.

The prison was purpose-built in 1997 under the government's *Private Finance Initiative* (PFI) on a design, build and finance contract by Group 4 and key partner Tarmac. Group 4 (now G4S) holds a 25 year contract to operate and manage the prison.

HMP Altcourse opened for prisoners in December 1997. It is a Category B Local and Remand prison serving the courts of Cheshire, North Wales and Merseyside. Maximum Operational Capacity is 1324 male offenders both on remand and sentenced, from the age of 18 upwards. It is currently contracted to provide 1204 places (although this is to reduce to 1108 later this year) and is the designated prison for all the courts in North Wales from where approximately 30% of prisoners originate.

There are seven residential units, a Healthcare unit, Sports Hall and two football pitches, Care and Separation Unit, Workshops and Vocational Training units on site, together with a variety of facilities which support the daily routine of the prison. The site is well laid out and maintained and prisoners are trusted to move from unit to unit without escort and with minimal supervision wherever possible.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.1 PARTICULAR ISSUES REQUIRING A RESPONSE

1. The lack of effective diversion from the courts in North Wales of severely mentally unwell offenders (5.3.1.i). Too many offenders who should **never** be committed to prison are being inappropriately located in Altcourse when they should be in the care of secure units. The recommendations of the Bradley Report concerning courts having access to mental health liaison and diversion services are not being applied in North Wales courts.

2. Even when a psychiatrist has assessed and recommended a prisoner for removal to a secure unit rather than prison, the time scales involved are unacceptable and well above the 14 day removal time recommended by Lord Bradley and accepted by the Government. (5.3.1.ii)

3. There has been an increase in violence over the reporting year which has been a matter of some concern, despite a declared 'zero tolerance' policy introduced by management. Factors may involve a decrease in the availability of contraband drugs and mobile phones due to other security measures taken and the diligence of staff. This inevitably raises the price of contraband and an increase in debt amongst offenders leading to a rise in bullying and violence. This Board has always admired the 'honest' reporting which is prevalent at Altcourse and expects this increase to be a 'blip' as other policies to combat bullying and violence (see Section 5.6) are introduced.

4.2 PREVIOUS YEARS CONCERNS

1. Transfer of prisoners who have gained their Cat D status to open conditions remains problematic. Over the past 12 months only 25 eligible prisoners have been transferred to HMP Kirkham and there are approximately 45 Cat D prisoners in HMP Altcourse awaiting places at present. It appears that local prisons remain disadvantaged by the present policy. OCA report that there is a new initiative to raise the acceptance age to 30 at HMYOI Thorn Cross for Cheshire based Cat Ds. It is very much hoped that this will relieve some of the pressure on the open estate.

2. Once again, this Board has to comment on the import of illicit mobile phones. 449 (364) have been retrieved during the reporting year and 101 SIM cards. Technology to render these mobiles useless is still not in place and the growing menace they represent goes unaddressed. A total of 179 parcels, many containing drugs and mobiles, have also been retrieved, many of these thrown over the wall at times arranged 'to order' by those using illicit mobiles from inside the prison. The efforts of Security at HMP Altcourse in seeking out and retrieving such contraband is very effective and to be applauded, this criticism is aimed at NOMS for failing to address the issue, not at the prison itself.

4.3 ISSUES FOR THE DIRECTOR/G4S

1. Foreign language information screens installed throughout the prison are no longer operational. Are they to be reinstated or replaced? (5.1)

2. We have raised on many occasions the lack of any shelter or access to toilet facilities for those waiting to collect prisoners on release from custody. As the prison is unable to give any fixed time for releases family and friends are often waiting several hours. For those who have travelled long distances the lack of toilet facilities is embarrassing and those who have arrived by public transport are often left standing out in the rain and cold for long periods. There is also no access to a telephone where people can call a taxi. We feel

that family and friends should not be treated in this way and would ask that G4S remedy this situation which reflects very badly on the caring ethos of the establishment.

4.4 OTHER ISSUES OF EXCELLENCE NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

1. The Board would like to commend the trial acceptance of 5 long term SPD prisoners from HMP Frankland's Therapeutic Unit who settled in very well and have made good progress. 3 have now gained Cat C status and have jobs in the prison, 1 has recently been released. The experiment has been so successful that further admissions are in the pipeline. The positive effects on such long-term prisoners are tangible and impressive.
2. The presentation of past service medals to ex-service prisoners during the Remembrance Day service last November was very moving, poignant and much appreciated by the recipients.
3. The introduction of the Intuitive Recovery Course (Re-education for Addictions) "Your toolbox to get off drugs and stay off drugs – for good!". A fine example of Altcourse pushing the boundaries to challenge drug abuse by offenders. (see Sec. 6)
4. Family Intervention Unit – just commencing. A 7 week programme to improve family relationships and parenting skills. This will include family days in the prison with a 'party' atmosphere, and family learning together sessions.
5. Falconry Project. An exciting initiative set up as an alternative to PAT dogs which will involve both staff and some vulnerable prisoners in caring for birds of prey and learning how to 'fly' them. Two Harris hawks are already resident under the care of a prisoner who is an experienced falconer.
6. Apprenticeship schemes in association with Walsall College which will involve selected prisoners in achieving Level 2 NVQ in Performing Manufacturing Operations alongside Functional Skills in English and Mathematics leading to a BTEC Diploma in Engineering. (see Sec 5.2)
7. Enhanced Unit recently relocated to Canal Unit. All prisoners on the Unit are employed, including 20 who work as unit cleaners and servery workers. (see Sec 5.8)
8. Radio Altcourse and the Drama Group continue to thrive producing good quality entertainment for prisoners together with work within the community for 'at risk' youngsters.

4.5 OVERALL JUDGEMENT

The overall impression this Board has of HMP Altcourse is of a prison well run and managed. Despite the complexities of being a local and remand prison with a transient and fluctuating daily population, management have coped with the restrictions of the core day and come up with a range of initiatives which 'normalise' the daily routine here in a way which might only be expected in a resettlement prison. The emphasis is firmly on a working ethos in which prisoners are expected to take responsibility for their own lives and for each other. The majority of prisoners respond positively to this ethos. Most prisoners move freely from their residential unit to work, library, healthcare, visits etc. without escort.

There is a range of jobs on offer, many of which are designed to equip prisoners on release to hold their own in the employment market with the transferable skills which they can acquire. The 40 hour week has been implemented in some of the workshops and prisoner workers take responsibility for getting themselves to work on time and fulfilling their duties whilst there.

Many prisoners are identified as mentors, helping others to learn new skills, and several act as 'trained carers' supporting those with mental health, self-harm or emotional issues through the bad times.

On the whole this is a 'can do' establishment with a dynamic management team who plan 'outside the box' to meet the needs of a mixed and sometimes difficult population.

5.1 EQUALITY & INCLUSION

The DEAT team continues to meet bi-monthly and is chaired by the Deputy Director. Attendance can vary considerably. In addition, prisoner representatives also attend. The IMB has an Equality and Inclusion lead who attends all meetings as an observer.

The prison has a dedicated Equality Manager and an Equality Officer who report to the meeting with regular updates on the Equality Action Plan and statistics. Despite the focus of PSI 32/2011, which urges prisons to 'mainstream' the equality agenda by raising awareness and embedding equality across management and all sections of the prison, there continues to be a strong reliance on these identified individuals.

- **Race Equality**

The prison has a zero tolerance approach to racist incidents and behaviour, as evidenced by the monitoring of adjudications and Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms. The prominent position of 'Respect' posters throughout the prison, highlights this approach, and helps promote a climate of zero tolerance. Altcourse is a predominantly 'white' prison in terms of both staff and prisoners. As a result this must intensify the experience of 'difference' for any non-white prisoner or staff member entering the establishment.

- **Foreign Nationals**

In May 2012 there were 42 (60) foreign nationals held at Altcourse and just 2 (5) detainees (IS91). The profile is changing to that of more short term, Eastern European nationals. Prisoners whose first language is not English now have access to 'The Big Word', and can use 3 way handsets to access this 24-hour interpreting service at key points during their sentence. The Board is disappointed that the foreign language information screens located around the prison are no longer operational.

- **Religion**

Chaplaincy staff describe continuing workload pressures. They are involved in a range of initiatives throughout the prison and have a high profile. There were long-standing problems recruiting a permanent Imam (now resolved).

- **Disability**

There are a limited number of cells adapted to meet specific needs and conversion of a standard cell is problematic. As a consequence wheelchair users are sometimes held on healthcare, taking up 'beds' for prisoners with more urgent healthcare needs. Wheelchair dependent prisoners therefore have difficulties in accessing a standard regime of activities, employment and association whilst on healthcare.

There has been discussion about the difficulties of integrating disabled prisoners' care plans with their sentence plans because of issues of confidentiality.

A gap has been identified in terms of prison staff who can use British Sign Language and this is being addressed.

- **Age**

Discussions about developing a dedicated Older Prisoners unit are ongoing and prisoner representatives express some frustration at what they perceive to be the slow pace of implementing this initiative. The question as to whether vulnerable older prisoners might be integrated into such a unit is presenting some challenge to the management team.

- **Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender**

There are a very small number of complaints registered against these 'protected' groups. It is perhaps not surprising that both staff and prisoners might be reluctant to disclose issues around sexuality. The DEAT has identified that there is a need to raise the profile of support on offer and with this in mind, contact with a community campaigning/support group has been instigated.

5.2 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

The prison offers access to a wide range of educational opportunities from Basic Skills and ESOL to higher level courses including the PTTLs teaching qualification. Much work has been undertaken this year to develop the provision of vocational training within the establishment.

Prisoners work towards recognised qualifications. Current industries reflect the world of work and customer satisfaction and quality assurance are key considerations for both staff and the prisoners employed.

- A 40 hour working week has been introduced for the engineering workshops. Lunch is provided at the workplace.
- Contract work is undertaken in the workshops for both other prisons and outside companies.
- The prison is now fully prepared for the delivery of enhanced qualifications and apprenticeships in partnership with Walsall College. Work based learning together with formal study sessions will lead to a Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Engineering together with Level 1 Functional Skills in literacy, numeracy and computer aided drawing or design. Employability skills have been embedded into the programme of learning.
- A highly skilled ex-offender from Altcourse is employed full time in the workshop to deliver functional skills on the apprenticeship course.
- Prisoners enjoy work and regard it as a meaningful activity which, together with accreditation, will assist them in gaining employment on their release from custody.
- A needs analysis has been conducted by Liverpool Community College for prisoner and staff training relevant to the skills needed in the geographic resettlement areas the prisoners will return to on their release.

5.2.1 Areas of concern

- i. The loss of 5000 teaching hours in efficiency savings for the Ministry of Justice has resulted in no educational provision for prisoners in CSU. However efforts are made by the education provider to accommodate specific requests.
- ii. Whilst prisoners are able to access many of the programmes required by their sentence plans, information about the requirements of individual sentence plans is not easily available to the personal officers and departments involved in supporting the prisoner through his time in custody.

5.3 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

The PCT/G4S partnership board has continued to meet on a quarterly basis and has provided the focus and drive for the delivery of effective healthcare development and improvement strategy. However, with the current NHS change programme, which includes the demise of PCTs nationally, the Board is concerned that it is still unclear how this very important function will be replaced in the future.

The In-reach Team has recently moved into the Healthcare Building and this has improved communications with the mainstream Health Teams, particularly Mental Health.

98 IMB applications were received relating to healthcare issues compared to 130 the previous year, which represents a 25% reduction. The Board had some concerns about the waiting list to see the doctor but this has been addressed by the Healthcare Manager and is much improved (max. 2 weeks). The dentist offers approximately 250 appointments per month, and there is a maximum of 2 weeks wait. Most queries raised were of a general nature and the Board is satisfied there are no trends or concerns to highlight in this report.

Overall the Board is content that the general healthcare provided within the prison meets the standards which prisoners could reasonably expect in the community.

5.3.1 Areas of Concern

- i. Mental Health issues once again need to be highlighted. The Board would stress that the demands placed on prison staff are totally unreasonable and urgent action needs to be taken. The prison is not equipped or expected to meet the demands and challenges which have been steadily increasing each year. The senior RMN feels she is running a

'psychiatric unit within a prison' without the essential safeguards (e.g. the ability to medicate without consent) that are afforded in a secure facility. Senior RMNs are holding the decision brief without a psychiatrist on site and staff are frequently being assaulted and verbally abused.

ii. Court diversion systems are in place with the Cheshire and Merseyside courts and most offenders with severe mental health issues are re-directed to appropriate institutions. It is a matter of grave concern that this does not happen in the Welsh Courts which this prison serves. Over a six month period at least 20 severely mentally unwell prisoners have been committed by the courts in North Wales to this prison, one of whom attempted to murder a nurse in the healthcare unit and then spent 3 months in CSU before he was eventually transferred to a Secure Mental Hospital. Keeping such a severely unwell but dangerous prisoner in a segregation cell without appropriate medication was both unsafe and inhumane. However this Board has nothing but praise for the empathy shown by staff at Altcourse, at considerable personal risk, during this prolonged period, and for the careful management of this unacceptable and inappropriate placement.

iii. The in-patient facility at HMP Altcourse has been dominated this year by inappropriate committals to prison of severely mentally unwell offenders mostly from the Welsh courts. Staff have coped admirably under very difficult circumstances, but this influx also has a profound effect on other prisoners located in healthcare who are medically unwell and deserve a place which is calm, quiet and peaceful, particularly those requiring palliative care. There have been several disturbed prisoners requiring constant watch and some in-patients have caused major damage to fixtures and fittings, including the leisure facilities for prisoners.

5.4 PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY (see Section 5.2 also)

Despite the limitations of a constantly changing population the establishment has always delivered a high level of purposeful activity and support to prisoners. The imposition of the Core Day over the past year has had the effect of reducing time out of cell and thus the time available for purposeful activity. However, changes to the regime have been kept to a minimum and Altcourse has retained its High Performing status.

- Workshops include a commercial laundry, Office assembly, a Sewing workshop, Engineering, Paint shop and Fabrication. All allow prisoners to gain meaningful work experience – pay rates reflect the skills involved. Prisoners with work skills can act as mentors to others and are paid extra accordingly.
- The Vocational Training Unit teaches skills in painting and decorating, brickwork, woodwork and car maintenance alongside associated relevant education.
- The Sports Centre contains a fully equipped gym. It employs 12 officers each with responsibility for a residential unit. Most units are allocated four sessions per week one of which will promote 'healthy lifestyles' and include a fitness regime. Remedial therapy sessions are arranged for prisoners who have a range of health problems. Reciprocal work is done with the community including football tournaments with local teams. Charity events are a regular feature.

5.5 RESETTLEMENT

The Resettlement unit deals with accommodation needs for prisoners serving sentences not exceeding 12 months and for those recalled on licence. One section is funded by the Welsh Assembly and supports prisoners from North Wales. The other deals with prisoners from all other areas of the U.K. and has no additional funding.

- Unit staff are dedicated to supporting prisoners from their admission with a range of matters including housing benefits and debts.

- Shelter Cymru supports Welsh prisoners. A representative from the Citizens Advice Bureau makes regular visits and will access legal aid for prisoners and act on their behalf to resolve any financial disputes which reach court.
- A Transition of Support Service is available for Welsh prisoners to engage a prisoner upon release with his home area, but there is nothing comparable in place for prisoners from other areas. However the Unit Manager is awaiting information from Shelter England regarding the cost of a similar service.
- The unit offers a money management programme for prisoners.
- There is a facility to enable prisoners to open a bank account.

5.6 SAFER CUSTODY

Duty of Care is recognised as a high priority in HMP Altcourse and the small Safer Custody team continue to maintain a high standard of performance in a challenging and dynamic area of operation. The monthly Safer Custody meetings monitor performance in detail and decide on changes or new initiatives needed to ensure continued and improved performance. However, there appears to be an upward trend in self-harm recently which the Board will be monitoring carefully in future.

Strategies and Initiatives

- The Violence Reduction Strategy has been reviewed and updated in accordance with PSOs, PSIs, area and national advice and operational experience. The revised strategy was introduced in April 2012.
- An External Audit of Safer Custody carried out under new procedures introduced in May 2012, rated the department amber/green.
- Cell Sharing Risk Assessment (CSRA) is robust and no serious incidents have been reported in shared cells during the reporting period.
- Reintegration plans have been introduced for prisoners on Rule 45 GOOD in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU). A short training programme is delivered by the CSU manager and the aim is to improve the behaviour of these prisoners when they return to normal location.
- Reduced Risk Cells have been established, three in CSU and three in Healthcare. All the cells have potential ligature points removed or enclosed in very strong materials. Additionally the three cells in CSU are fitted with CCTV cameras.
- The Anti Bullying Policy ensures that an Incentive and earned Privileges (IEP) review takes place and many offenders are demoted to Basic Regime or Level 2. Also a new approach has been initiated where prisoners on ABS report have to be spoken to by wing officers three times a day and reminded that they are being watched. This strategy is working well as fewer prisoners who have been on an anti bullying regime are reoffending.
- Victims of bullying or anti-social behaviour are offered support at an early stage. They are interviewed by a manager to ascertain any immediate concerns to ensure that they are offered all relevant support.
- The Papyrus "Talk-to-Me Hope Line" has been made available on a free pin number on all units. This is particularly aimed at young offenders.
- Two Carers attend the monthly Safer Custody meetings and play an active part in the discussions. They are regarded as providing essential and valuable contributions to the meeting.
- The contribution made by Carers to the safety and wellbeing of prisoners continues to expand and the number has been increased to 21 including 3 on a part time basis. Carers are now also involved in the prisoners' induction programme.
- Serious incidents of self-harm in the last three months of the reporting year averaged 90 per month compared with an average 57 per month over the preceding nine months. This has raised concerns that some prisoners are being received from court who are not mentally fit to be in a normal prison. (see 5.3.i)

ACCT

- PSI 64/2011 was fully implemented by 1st April 2012.
- ACCT report books have been updated.
- The criteria for deciding the number and type of watches required by each prisoner has been reviewed. The number of watches per hour will depend upon the assessment of the level of risk of self harm for the prisoner. Regular conversation sessions have also been introduced as an alternative to watches if assessment indicates that this is the best way forward for the prisoner.
- A Pegging system has been installed to record and monitor all watches made to individual prisoners by officers on each wing. The system automatically produces an accurate record of all watches over each twenty four hour period. This enables rapid monitoring and identification of any missed watches and immediate remedial action when necessary. The recent audit praised the efficient record keeping.
- All operational staff having contact with prisoners, including IMB members, are given Mental Health Awareness training and it is proposed to extend this training to the Carers.

Deaths in Custody

There have been no self-inflicted deaths during the reporting period. There have however been two deaths by natural causes and the prison offered exceptional support to the families.

The two inquests outstanding in the 2010/2011 report have still not been concluded. There are no other inquests outstanding.

5.7 SEGREGATION, CARE AND SEPARATION

The CSU is monitored with particular attention to the requirements of PSO 1700. In this annual report we highlight those matters which cause concern together with changes and good practice which are of particular note.

5.7.1 Concerns

- The increasing number of severely mentally disordered prisoners, committed by the courts, many of whom, because of their unpredictable behaviour, have to be located on CSU, and the time taken to have those prisoners transferred to secure hospital conditions
- Mental health awareness training for some CSU staff has not yet been delivered.
- The often unacceptable delay in transferring to other establishments prisoners who cannot be located elsewhere in the prison – despite the best efforts of OCA
- The time taken by the police to respond to offences committed by prisoners in custody, who are held in the CSU on Rule 45/49 GOOD pending investigation
- The lack of written updates on the progress of security investigations, when prisoners are held in the CSU on GOOD ‘pending investigation’ and are subject to review
- The number of prisoners housed in CSU on own interest, due to a lack of spaces on the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit

5.7.2 Changes and Good Practice

- The care, patience, empathy and bravery shown by CSU staff when dealing with mentally disordered prisoners – there are many specific examples
- The availability of television for own interest prisoners and clockwork radio for others – although inevitably, given the nature of a CSU, there are shortages from time to time
- The good use of the VP unit during the day for association, when own interest prisoners are housed on the CSU awaiting space
- The streamlining of the system of referrals to the Senior District Judge, who attends Altcourse on a regular basis to undertake the external adjudications (an average of 8 per month)

- The special cells have not been used during this reporting period and it is worthy of note that there are not (nor have there ever been) mechanical restraints in the establishment
- The range of options attempted by senior management to reserve the CSU for the most vulnerable and for those for whom there is no other viable alternative available

5.8 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Altcourse holds approximately 1000 adult male prisoners, 750 of whom will be sentenced, approximately 250 on remand. 85 of these prisoners will be classified as 'older', i.e. over 50, and approximately 35-40 will be foreign nationals. Additionally, approximately 160 young offenders (18-20) will be held, mostly on remand or awaiting sentence. These young people cause a disproportionate amount of work for staff, and are frequently represented in the CSU or on Basic regime. All have to be housed (mostly in double cells), fed and their needs met.

- Convicted enhanced prisoners now have a dedicated unit where they are granted a say in what should be provided and how it should be run. All have kettles in cell, fridges on the landing for storing their own food and drink and their own crockery and cutlery. The unit is effectively 'managed' by the prisoners who are responsible for its cleanliness.
- The newest unit, Foinavon, is all single cell and is 'home' for those attending the Vocational Training Unit. It will also house the new Family Intervention Unit and, eventually, a dedicated unit for older prisoners. The newest residents include the two Harris hawks that have a custom built aviary (constructed in the Woodwork shop) within Foinavon's boundaries.
- On the west side of the site Melling Unit houses the Induction and First night centre, and Furlong the Detox and IDTS unit and also the new 12 week voluntary Drug Recovery Programme which has recently been established.
- Sub-contractors Aramark hold the catering contract. Food quality has been variable over the year but has recently shown signs of improvement. The availability of food comment books is patchy. New heated trolleys have overcome some of the 'quality at point of serving' problems. All prisoner server workers undertake the basic hygiene course and cleanliness of serveries has improved recently.
- Prisoners get two cooked meals Mon-Thurs. Friday dinner is a hot meal, supper is sandwiches with chips. Breakfast packs are issued Mon-Fri, at weekends Brunch is served around 11 am, the evening meal is sandwiches, cake, fruit, soup – all of which can be eaten when the prisoner chooses.
- All special diets are catered for in consultation with the doctor and the kitchen manager. Hot boxes and kettles are available to allow Muslim prisoners to observe Ramadan, and all food is prepared according to guidelines, with the assistance of Muslim kitchen workers.
- Aramark also run the shop (canteen) and employ 12 prisoner workers to pick and pack the orders. Prisoners are represented at 'shop meetings' to adjust the shop list and special requests are catered for whenever possible. The system works well on the whole and prices include special offers from time to time.
- Despite the restrictions of the core day, access to Visits remains good, with two sessions Mon-Thu, one session on a Friday, and two sessions Sat-Sun.

6. OTHER AREAS OF THE PRISON REGIME ON WHICH THE BOARD WISHES TO REPORT

Drug Strategy

The prevention of illicit drugs coming into the establishment has been well documented in previous Annual Reports and continues to be an immense challenge. G4S remain proactive and highly committed through a robust Drugs Policy and strive to reduce the supply, demand and misuse of controlled drugs within the establishment.

Regular 'Drug Strategy' meetings are held to review and coordinate all aspects from security issues through to intervention programmes and the updating of the prison action plan.

The engagement of the CARATS Team (numbering 13) remains the core intervention to addressing drug use with about 340 prisoners, representing 32% of the prison population, being supported through various activities and programmes.

IDTS continues to be effectively controlled and delivered to prisoners requiring this support. On average there are about 150 prisoners – 15% of the prison population – on the programme, which is a similar level to last year.

The visitors centre is targeted by staff on a regular basis to encourage families to provide additional motivation and support to prisoners to address their drug misuse.

It is particularly encouraging to report that there is a general view expressed by staff that more prisoners are now coming forward and requesting help with drug rehabilitation.

Other support programmes and new initiatives we would like to highlight are:

Healthcare 2 – This '5 day stabilisation and assessment unit' offers the opportunity of dedicated support specifically for new prisoners to the establishment with drug or alcohol abuse issues. This initiative was introduced 18 months ago and continues to receive positive feedback from prisoners requiring this intervention at a critical time before they are transferred to the main detox residential unit.

Intuitive Recovery – This voluntary optional programme to 'kick' drug misuse was first introduced in June 2011 and 257 prisoners have now successfully completed and graduated from the course. 3 courses are delivered per month and demand for the course (described as 'life changing' by participants) has steadily increased, with approximately 120 prisoners on the waiting list.

The course is run by a contracted supplier and ex-drug users deliver the 4 day intensive and non-drug intervention programme. The course has clearly been effective and continues to evolve and two important developments to mention are:

1. Appropriate prisoners are being trained as peer mentors to provide further support and motivation to prisoners
2. The course is also offered in the community and we are pleased to report that an ex-Altcourse prisoner is being trained to deliver the programme.

Drug Recovery Programme – This 10 week pilot course was recently delivered. 11 prisoners successfully completed and graduated from the course. The range of programmes included treatment to address drugs misuse coupled with the opportunity to develop employment and life skills. The feedback from prisoners who attended this first

course has been positive and they clearly felt it had been most beneficial. The second programme is currently underway.

Alternative Therapies – These are offered to complement conventional treatments as it is now recognised that alternative therapies can play a very important part in recovery from illnesses and addictions. The therapies include Acupuncture, Indian Head Massage, Hypnotherapy and Emotional Freedom Techniques with Reiki being introduced shortly.

Drugs misuse undoubtedly remains a major challenge and staff continue to work hard in tackling the supply problem and offering solution options to prisoners. However, there have been some encouraging signs, particularly with the new rehabilitation initiatives mentioned above which are having a very positive impact on addressing the misuse of drugs.

7. THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	2010	2011	2012
Recommended Complement of Board Members	20	20	20
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13	13	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	16	14	10
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	4	5	2
Number of members leaving within reporting period	1	4	6
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	764	520	562
Total number of segregation reviews held	111	106	120
Total number of segregation reviews attended	96	103	112
Date of Annual Team Performance Review	26.5.10	25.5.11	23.5.12

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
A	Accommodation	48	47	39	28
B	Adjudications	20	13	25	6
C	Equality & Diversity	14	10	9	3
D	Education/employment/training	39	91	103	58
E	Family/visits	69	92	110	69
F	Food/kitchen related	44	28	23	21
G	Health related	141	181	130	98
H1	Property (Current establishment)	65	84	81	40
H2	Property (Transfers / in other establishment)	80	98	65	42
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping & Argos)	5	22	12	8
I	Sentence related	349	358	186	91
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	54	54	44	22
K	Transfers	44	51	69	41
L	Miscellaneous	199	209	159	89
Total number of applications		1171	1338	1055	616
Average per month		98	112	88	51
Percentage change on previous year (%)		22	14	- 21	- 42
Confidential access to Chair		45	138	97	39
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		1055	1373	1141	654

We continue to take a robust response to applications during the year with prisoners being encouraged to raise 'routine' queries with unit staff. It will be noted from above this has resulted in a 42% reduction in applications from prisoners. This change is also reflected in the formal Request and Complaints system.

BOARD MATTERS

This has been a year of change for the Board with its current strength reduced to only 10 members. Furthermore, we had a change of Chair and Vice Chair at the start of the calendar year.

During the reporting period 6 members have stood down from the Board including our previous Chair. We would like to record our thanks and appreciation for their commitment and dedication to the role, which ranges from 2 to 14 years service. We are pleased to report that two new members have joined us and are making good progress through the probationary year process. We have also started a recruitment campaign to further strengthen the size and diversity of the Board.

The opportunity was taken at the start of the year to fully review our tasks and responsibilities, which resulted in a number of operational changes. It is pleasing to report that following our recent Annual Team Performance Review, the changes have had a very positive impact on our efficiency and effectiveness.

The Board is also pleased to report that the key objectives for the year ending the 30th June have been evaluated and the Board is satisfied they have been fully met and importantly had the desired impact.

An improvement plan for the new operating year, starting on the 1st July 2012, has been agreed and is fully supported by a proposed learning and development plan to take the Board forward for another challenging year.

Turning to the wider IMB tasks, 3 members serve on the following groups:

- Chair – IMB Reference Book Working Group and the Healthcare Support Group
- Vice Chair - an Independent Interviewer assisting with Board recruitment of new members at establishments across the North West area
- Board Development Officer - continues to serve on the National Training and Development Strategy Group

General Duties of the Board:

Applications

Attendance with the external arbiter on a three-weekly basis

Attendance as observers at establishment committees (see list below)

Attendance at the Coroner's Court

Basic Regime review boards

CSU review boards

Observation of adjudications

Presentation of an induction programme to new prisoners

Presentation to the initial training courses for new staff

Weekly rota visits

Meetings attended by the Board:

PCT Partnership Meeting

Drug Strategy

Diversity Group

Quality Improvement Group

Resettlement

Safer Custody

Security

Separation Management and Review Group

IMB Annual Conference

Contracted Prisons Chairs Meeting

North West Area Chairs Meeting

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

I took up the role as chairperson of the IMB at HMP Altcourse in January 2012 for the second time after ten years. It has been a fulfilling and very time-consuming six months, but as this is an Annual Report from July 2011, I pay tribute to the huge contribution of my predecessor, John Schofield, until December 2011. John served on the Altcourse Board for a total of 14 years, nine of them as Chairman. His were big boots to fill, and, as our numbers have been well below complement since January; it has not been an easy task to meet all the requirements of effectively monitoring such a large and complex establishment. We have rationalised our workload and procedures and are constantly trying to recruit additional members of the team.

The decision to limit IMB members' tenure of appointment has come as a bitter blow to those of us who have given many years of unpaid public service **and** to those less experienced board members who have relied on us to mentor and guide them. The arguments have all been made and some concessions granted but for this Board it will mean the loss of three experienced members at or before the next Triennial Review when we are already struggling to keep our heads above water. The recruitment and mentoring process is under way but is very time consuming and takes us away from the essential duties we should be undertaking – monitoring the welfare of the prisoners in this establishment.

This Annual Report is a positive one on the whole. This is a good establishment with many unique features and a hard-working management and staff team. However, that does not mean that the IMB at HMP Altcourse is redundant. We would like to think that it is partly because this pro-active and committed Board has, over the years, cast a robustly critical eye over what happens here and raised awareness accordingly that the experience for prisoners is a decent one. The erosion of experience on our Board is a matter of concern for the future.

I sincerely thank all my current team of committed hardworking members who have supported me so well over the past six months, in particular my Deputy and Board Development Officer without whose help and guidance I would have floundered. I also thank all those members who have retired from the Board but who are part of this reporting year, in particular past chairman John for so many years of dedicated service to the IMB at HMP Altcourse.

Sheila M Royle MBE
Chair
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Altcourse

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY OF PRISON-RELATED ABBREVIATIONS USED

ACCT	Assessment, Care in Custody and Treatment
AD	Adult Prisoner
BME	Black & Minority Ethnic
CARATS	Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice & Throughcare Scheme <i>(Drug & alcohol support)</i>
CC	Cellular Confinement <i>(Adjudication punishment)</i>
CSU	Care & Separation Unit
DRP	Drug Recovery Programme
FN	Foreign National
HDC	Home Detention Curfew <i>(The Tag)</i>
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMCIP	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
IMB	Independent Monitoring Board
IEP	Incentives and Earned Privileges
Licence	Conditions under which prisoner is released from custody
IDTS	Integrated Drug Treatment Strategy
IR	Intuitive Recovery <i>(Accredited drug recovery programme)</i>
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MDT	Mandatory Drug Testing
NACRO	National Association for Care & Resettlement of Offenders
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
OI	Own Interests or Request or Protection
PB	Parole Board
PPO	Prisons and Probationary Ombudsman
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PS	Prison Service
PRT	Prison Reform Trust <i>(Charity that works to create just, human, & effective penal system)</i>

PSI	Prison Service Instruction
PSO	Prison Service Order
PTTLS	Preparing to teach in the Lifelong Learning sector
ROTL	Release on Temporary Licence
SMARG	Segregation Monitoring Review Group
SPD	Serious Personality Disorder
VPU	Vulnerable Prisoner Unit
VDT	Voluntary Drug Testing
YO / YP	Young Offender / Young Person (<i>Aged between 18 to 21 years</i>)