



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

at

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

for the period

JULY 2012 – JUNE 2013

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 and selected 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, of any concern it judges appropriate.
- (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.

ALTCOURSE IMB SPECIFIC OPERATING ROLE

The IMB at Altcourse is fully committed to its unique and important role. Professional in its approach and inclusive in its ethos, the Board operates utilising a strong team spirit to maximise its resources together with a culture of continuous improvement and re-evaluation.

In line with best practice, the Board undertakes a formal and rigorous Annual Team Performance review to evaluate its effectiveness. This results in the development of an Annual Improvement Plan with clear objectives and a tailored learning plan.

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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. Currently contracted for the provision of 1033 places, it 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

The Board has been vociferous for many years and in many Annual Reports regarding the menace of illicit mobile phones. As predicted the phones have reduced in size and increased in the range of services which can be accessed. As technology regarding blocking equipment becomes more sophisticated, it would seem that the time is right to reconsider installing equipment which would render any illicit mobile phones in the establishment useless. 328 illicit mobile phones and 101 SIM cards have been retrieved during this reporting year, a reduction from (449) mobile phones and coincidentally (101) SIM cards in the last reporting year. These figures are against a reduced roll and occasional use of portable netting.

In conjunction with the above, the Board considers that the netting of **all** exercise yards would make absolute sense. (6.2)

4.2 PREVIOUS YEAR'S CONCERNS

There are still concerns that the time taken for the process to transfer mentally ill prisoners to appropriate secure institutions is longer than ideal and needs to be reviewed - i.e. from the time diagnosed/sectioned to receipt of the warrant. The delay would appear to be with the external hospitals and is above the fourteen day removal time recommended by Lord Bradley and accepted by the Government. Additional pressure is placed on the Care and Separation Unit when these prisoners are so unwell that they are a danger to themselves, other prisoners and staff and are too volatile to be held on the Healthcare unit with sick and vulnerable prisoners. (5.3)

The Board is pleased to document the tremendous improvement in terms of severely mentally unwell prisoners, convicted by the Magistrates' Courts in North Wales, who are now being redirected to appropriate institutions. Since the matter was raised in last year's Annual Report, an excellent relationship has been established between the Primary Mental Health lead at the prison and the relevant authorities. This bodes well for the future. (5.3)

The Board is also pleased to report that the concern raised last year regarding the transfer of prisoners who had gained their Cat D status to open conditions, is no longer an issue. There have been changes in the acceptance criteria at HMP Thorn Cross and HMP Kennet that have resolved this matter.

In the last Annual Report the Board raised concerns at the level of violence and the establishment's failure to perform against the KPT Serious Assaults target. It is pleasing to note that as a result of wide ranging initiatives encompassing all elements of Anti-Social Behaviour there appears to have been an element of progress. In April, May and June of this year the number of serious assaults fell to below Key Performance Targets. (5.6)

4.3 ISSUES FOR THE DIRECTOR/G4S

The Board has raised on many occasions the lack of any shelter or access to toilet facilities for those waiting to collect prisoners on release from custody. For those who have travelled long distances the lack of toilet facilities is embarrassing and those who have arrived by public transport have no shelter. The Board considers this is an unfortunate first impression for visitors, which reflects badly on the caring ethos of the establishment.

As we move towards a time of change, we hope this matter will be reconsidered.

The visits booking section is extremely busy and if, for any reason, the normal complement of clerks is reduced, it soon becomes a delay issue – with complaints to the main switchboard. When raised by the Board the situation is rectified, but it would be preferable if strategies were put in place to alleviate the problem before it arises. A telephone call to the visits booking section is often the first contact with the establishment and as such an important first impression.

4.4 OTHER ISSUES OF EXCELLENCE NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

- The success of the Birds of Prey Initiative – from the initial construction of the bird houses by the Joinery shop, to their sensible/security conscious placing and the control and care of the birds, has been an incredible piece of work. However, what has been the most impressive element of all has been the positive effect on the most vulnerable. Working with the Birds of Prey is now used as an intervention within the ACCT process in aiding and promoting mental health well-being and is seen as a therapeutic intervention. (5.3.ii)
- The progress and acceptance of Intuitive Recovery and the selection of the prison to run a pilot scheme, with an apprentice tutor recruited from the prisoner population. The prisoner who has been given the challenge is responding very well and if all continues in the same way, he could leave prison with a paid position with the Intuitive Recovery organisation. (6.0)
- Vocational training courses now include Computer Aided Design and Creative and Digital Technology. In the plastering workshop prisoners are working towards a level 2 diploma in Insulating and Building Treatments in External Wall Insulation. Preparations are underway for vocational training in construction. (5.2)
- The average figure for purposeful activity over the whole population exceeds requirements on a weekly basis (i.e. 36.50 hours for Sentenced Prisoners and 22.00 hours for Unsented and Young Offenders) with a number of prisoners working a 40 hour week. This is a considerable achievement by any measure. (5.4)
- A pilot scheme delivering an apprenticeship framework in Engineering was successfully completed by the 15 participants. The prison is now hoping to deliver National Apprenticeship Service courses. The proposal for this is currently being considered at ministerial level. (5.2)
- Sub-contractors Aramark who hold the catering contract, are involved in a resettlement initiative. Together with G4S they fund 2 x 6 month contracts for prisoners who have worked in the kitchens at Altcourse and have completed their sentence. Work placements are in the North West. (5.8)
- The Duke of Edinburgh scheme has been introduced. Eight prisoners are working to achieve the bronze award. The volunteering element takes place within the establishment. Discussions are ongoing to facilitate the expedition requirement outside the prison! (5.2)

4.5 OVERALL JUDGEMENT

The overall impression the Board has of HMP Altcourse is of a prison well run and well managed. As a local and remand prison with a fluctuating and transient population it is one of the most challenging of establishments to run and it is run in an imaginative and forward looking way. Bearing in mind that most prisoners spend a relatively short period in custody and are then released into the community, it makes perfect sense that the time spent in prison is used constructively. A key aim of the prison is to instil in prisoners a work ethic which they need to apply within the structured working day. It is also critical that they take responsibility for their own actions and proactive participation is encouraged via the IEP scheme and the various compacts. Most respond, some of course do not.

Purposeful Activity is critical and is both acknowledged and rewarded. Choosing to do nothing is discouraged and dealt with through the IEP scheme. (5.4)

Involvement of prisoners as Carers, Mentors, and Tutors is a win win situation. Not only does it benefit the recipient but it gives the prisoner who is providing the care or passing on the information a respect that many have not experienced before. The Board has seen numerous situations which illustrate the benefits of such an approach and has invited a number of those involved to address us at Board meetings. It is 'Respect' in an immediate, relevant and appropriate way – and it works.

It is the opinion of the Board that Altcourse is generally a 'healthy' prison in the widest sense of the word. It is hoped that any cuts in the operating budget, from whatever source, will be mindful of the fact that that which took much time to establish, can be destroyed in an instant.

5.1 EQUALITY & INCLUSION

The Equality and Inclusion Action team continues to meet bi monthly and is usually well attended by members of the management team and representatives from all departments of the establishment. The meeting is chaired by the Deputy Director which demonstrates ownership of the issue at senior management level. Prisoner representatives play an active role in meetings and have raised a number of important issues which the prison has taken forward. It is clear that prisoner representatives feel that their contribution is valued. There is a structured agenda and each protected group is discussed separately with the Equality and Inclusion Manager taking the lead in introducing each topic. IMB representatives regularly attend the policy meeting.

Race and Nationality

A perceived reduction in reporting of racist incidents was discussed at one DEAT meeting. However, the prisoner representative suggested that this might also reflect a dilution of the prisons zero tolerance approach. As a black prisoner his perception was quite different and this was seen as worthy of discussion and ongoing scrutiny. He has also made laminated posters encouraging the reporting of discriminatory behaviour and these are displayed throughout the establishment. This issue is also regularly aired on the prison radio and this has had the effect of raising its profile. Use of the 'big word' telephone interpreting service is regularly monitored. However, it is noted that its use is less frequent than would have been expected in Healthcare, an area where unambiguous communication is crucial to a prisoner's wellbeing.

Faith and Belief

The Chaplaincy offers a wide range of activities and opportunities for diverse faith groups to practise their respective religions. This has recently included Pagans and one Rastafarian. The Chaplaincy interprets its role very broadly and leads on innovative programmes such as Mediation and Restorative Justice.

Disability

The issue of wheelchair access and adapted cells continues to cause concern and a range of options is currently being explored. It is noted that the Sports Hall displays images of athletes with disabilities, promoting the inclusivity of sport. Special stress buster sessions are available for prisoners with mental health needs.

Age

An older prisoners unit has now been established and an older prisoner forum meets regularly. Consideration is being given to developing a programme of social care/activities for this prisoner group.

Gay, Lesbian, Bi Sexual and Transgender

There have been 2 transgender prisoners held at Altcourse within the last 12 months. Both have presented challenges and were held on Healthcare for their own and other prisoners' protection. Inevitably, this has limited their access to mainstream regimes.

The prison has made contact with Sahir House, a local organisation that supports individuals with HIV. The prison is planning to develop closer relationships, with a view to offering additional support to prisoners.

5.2 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

HMP Altcourse provides educational opportunities which range from Functional Skills in Maths, English and ICT to access to courses run by the Open University. Tuition is delivered in the Education Unit with the exception being the vulnerable prisoners who are taught on their own unit. The provision of vocational training has been developed this year in response to the findings of an independent needs analysis. Accredited courses are offered which will make prisoners more employable upon release by teaching them skills which meet the needs of their local community. Industries are growing. New outside contracts have been acquired for the workshops. Existing work in the Office Assembly workshop has increased by 25%.

- The delivery of Functional Skills offers an increased range of options for learners. Prisoners have meaningful activities embedded into the programme of learning at all levels. These could include help with reading legal documents or how to complete a manager's application form.
- The Shannon Trust Toe by Toe reading scheme has been put in place for none and emerging readers. Tutors work in partnership with the prison library to encourage progress. The programme can be continued at other prisons and on release via the Probation Service.
- Vocational training courses now include Computer Aided Design and Creative and Digital Technology. In the plastering workshop prisoners are working towards a level 2 diploma in Insulating and Building Treatments in External Wall Insulation. Preparations are underway for vocational training in construction.
- Prisoners are working a 40 hour week in 5 of the Industries workshops. Lunch is provided on site. This reflects the working world outside the prison.
- A pilot scheme delivering an apprenticeship framework in Engineering was successfully completed by the 15 participants. The prison is now hoping to deliver National Apprenticeship Service courses. The proposal for this is currently being considered at ministerial level.

- The Kit Car workshop is now operational, based on a Motor Vehicle Maintenance programme. There will be a new NVQ Level 2 qualification linked to the programme (2013/14).
- Recycling card and plastic yields revenue for the prison. Waste skips have been reduced by two thirds this year. The recycling and fabrication teams have been recognised in the G4S excellence awards.
- The Duke of Edinburgh scheme has been introduced. 8 prisoners are working to achieve the bronze award. The volunteering element takes place within the establishment. Discussions are ongoing to facilitate the expedition requirement outside the prison!

5.2.1. Areas of Concern

- This year 3290 teaching hours have been lost. This figure includes the loss of 1500 hours of ICT provision and the Dads Away course. However the overall level of regimes has been maintained.

5.3 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

As anticipated PCTs have ceased to exist nationally and healthcare services for prisons are now provided by the National Health Service Commissioning Board, which divides England into 4 regions (i.e. North of England, Midlands & East, South and London). All is then further divided until we arrive at the Lancashire Grouping, under the supervision of an Offender Health Commissioning Manager, working from Preston. The final piece of the reorganisation is the Merseyside Local Area Team (LAT) which comprises HMP Liverpool, HMP Kennet and HMP Altcourse. These changes have recently taken place, with the first meeting of the Merseyside LAT scheduled for early July – so it is too soon to comment. However, the IMB is invited to attend.

G.P. services at Altcourse are provided by two fully qualified doctors, who have previous experience of prisons and prisoners - and the complex needs they present. In line with government policy and supported by clinical guidelines, a robust approach has been taken with regard to appropriate medical prescribing, with regular reviews of medication. Not surprisingly, this has not been popular with all prisoners and in the short term the Board has seen an increase in applications related to healthcare. As a result of this, prisoners have been seen and listened to by board members and general explanation given, but they are aware that board members are not medically qualified and when their complaint relates solely to medical prescribing they are referred back to healthcare for a doctors appointment. Following the national reorganisation of the NHS any complaints which cannot be resolved at establishment level, will be forwarded in the first instance to the Offender Health Commissioning Manager for the Lancashire Grouping.

- Doctors' appointments have been reorganised, with separate weekly clinics held on the V.P. Units. The waiting time for prisoners to see the doctor is presently within 2 weeks.
- Dental appointments (250 per month). At the present time there is a maximum of 2 weeks wait

5.3.i Area of Concern

The Board has familiarised itself with the medical rationale behind the ethos of prudent and careful medical prescribing within the establishment and the responsibility of the prescribing doctor. If there is a concern, it is the way in which the information is communicated to the prisoner. As a Board, we feel that this is critical in ensuring a good level of acceptance – not an easy matter in a population generally more used to making demands. Interesting to note, that frequent reviews of medication and prudent, careful prescribing, have highlighted a high level of over-prescribing in the community.

Primary Care Mental Health

The Board is pleased to document the tremendous improvement in terms of severely mentally unwell prisoners, convicted by the Magistrates' Courts in North Wales, who are now being redirected to appropriate institutions. Since the matter was raised in last year's Annual Report, an excellent relationship has been established between the Primary Mental Health lead in the prison and the relevant authorities. This bodes well for the future.

- The Primary Mental Health team is up to full strength and its role and responsibilities within the Primary Health team are acknowledged, appreciated and understood. The link with In-Reach is further enhanced as the two mental health elements of care move towards shared accommodation
- There is an improved structure as we move forward, with close co-operation with Safer Custody re: implementing meaningful activities.
- Working with the Birds of Prey is now used as an intervention within the ACCT process in aiding and promoting mental health well-being. They are used as part of patients Care Plans; in a similar way to the use of other services and are seen as a therapeutic intervention.

5.3 ii Area of Concern

- There are concerns that the time taken for the process to transfer mentally ill prisoners to appropriate institutions is longer than ideal and needs to be reviewed. i.e. from the time diagnosed/sectioned to receipt of the warrant. The delay would appear to be with the external hospitals and is above the fourteen day removal time recommended by Lord Bradley and accepted by the Government. In addition, this places additional pressure on the Care and Separation Unit, when these prisoners are a danger to themselves, other prisoners and staff and too volatile to be held in Healthcare.

In-reach Mental Health Service

This service supports those with enduring mental health issues and prisoners with personality disorders, learning difficulties, autism, aspergers syndrome and acquired brain injury, who have complex needs and so require more intensive and structured mental health support from specialist services.

- The team case load consists of prisoners who are known to secondary mental health services in the community i.e. have received a formal diagnosis from psychiatrists.
- The team will also receive referrals from the Primary Mental Health team regarding individuals who are suspected of having a serious mental health problem and who have 'slipped through the net' in the community.
- Most of the case load is complex and the majority will also have issues regarding substance misuse (approximately 90%) hence multi-agency liaison is a crucial element of the team's role.
- New developments – Consultant Forensic Psychologist employed 3 hours per week. This has improved both the service and relationships with external agencies.
- The team welcome visits from external services to visit prisoners, although all are not able to do so due to budgetary constraints.
- When possible, the team will co-ordinate pre-release meetings for prisoners nearing the end of their sentences and invite other agencies to attend. Attendance is rare.

5.4 PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

Altcourse is seen as a working prison and in this the 'purposeful activity figure' is a key indicator. It is monitored on a weekly basis with the figures broken down into Sentenced, Unsentenced and Young Offender prisoners.

- Unsentenced prisoners are not required to take part in purposeful activity, but are encouraged to do so. Should they decide not to participate, they will be placed behind their door during the main day activity periods and will not have access to television during the time the activity is taking place. They may be placed on Standard or Basic regime, according to their pattern of behaviour. However, only those who work full time are eligible to be considered for Enhanced Level status.
- The average figure for purposeful activity over the whole population exceeds requirements on a weekly basis (i.e. 36.5hrs for Sentenced Prisoners and 22.00hrs for Unsentenced and Young Offenders) with a number of prisoners working a 40 hour week. This is a considerable achievement, when taking into consideration a) the 3 designated groups highlighted above and b) the core day implementation, which reduces time out of cell and thus the time available for purposeful activity.

The Board is aware that there are forthcoming changes to the IEP Scheme and the comments above cover the reporting year to 30 June 2013.

5.4.1 RESETTLEMENT (Incorporating OMU)

- Resettlement is now under the umbrella of 'Offender Management.' Resettlement officers are trained to be Offender Supervisors and trained in Oasys Report preparation. With regard to accommodation on release for prisoners who are No Fixed Abode (NFA) the situation is as follows:
 - **High Risk prisoners** – probation arrange suitable accommodation if needed.
 - **All other releases** – any NFA identified at initial interview, is 'work in progress' regarding accommodation on release. Their requirements are assessed and initially sent to the Homeless team or equivalent of the relevant council, depending on the particular area or circumstances. Each situation is different and is dealt with on an individual basis. However, it is most unlikely that an NFA prisoner would leave Altcourse without initial accommodation being in place. One possible exception would be if a prisoner chose to become, or remain, homeless and deliberately misled staff.
 - It is worthy of note that the Welsh Assembly guarantees initial accommodation for Welsh prisoners leaving custody. They also provide a mentor and if a prisoner needs collecting from the prison gate, that can be arranged.
 - Also available to prisoners prior to release is a range of services, for example – Debt Management/Obtaining banking facilities/Work opportunities via recruitment initiatives - with advice and guidance given on licence requirements and reporting conditions.
 - OMU is involved in managing custodial sentences coupled with sentence planning and the challenging role of matching resource to risk
 - Changes have been made, during this reporting year in the way in which Home Detention Curfew reviews are conducted. Prisoners now have the opportunity to attend their reviews and find out the recommendations 'first hand'. In addition, IMB members attend on occasion as part of their monitoring role.

5.5.i Area of Concern

The key aim of OMU is to cut reoffending, by working effectively with outside agencies. In the case of housing there should be a tripartite arrangement with – the offender manager, the prisoner and outside probation. Unfortunately, the outside probation service is not always as co-operative as it could be in this situation.

5.6 SAFER CUSTODY

The Safer Custody team continue their efforts to develop and improve an already robust policy to ensure a safe environment in the prison. This year has produced a number of challenges which have resulted in the introduction of new initiatives and the strengthening of existing strategies. A Continuous Improvement Plan is in place and is reviewed at each monthly meeting of the Safer Custody committee.

Strategies and Initiatives

- The Safer Custody Strategy has been reviewed and implemented in August 2012. All strategies are now included in one document.
- The number of family liaison officers has been increased to seven.
- In response to an Ombudsman Report on national practice which expressed concern over delays in calling an ambulance, emergency codes have been changed to conform to the PSI.
- Two refresher training courses on case management have been held this year.
- The eighteen bright orange Safer Custody notice boards have been updated throughout the prison. These display details of all support services available to prisoners.
- There are now thirteen full time and five part time carers. Two are delegated to look after new prisoners and all are available day and night.
- A monthly Safer Custody Bulletin was introduced in September 2012. This is available to all prison staff and its aim is to enable staff to understand the reason for and operation of safer custody strategies.
- Following the 2012 Safer Custody Audit the Carers Scheme was recognised as good practice. Since then other establishments have contacted Safer Custody for further information on the scheme.
- There is an increased involvement of families when conducting ACCT and Constant Watch Reviews. Without exception they have been amazed at the level of care shown to their relative and interested in explanations which are often at variance to what they have been told by the prisoner!

5.6 i Area of Concern

The Board is concerned that in the past the prison has not performed well regarding the KPT Serious Assaults target. However, it is pleasing to note that as a result of the under mentioned initiatives progress appears to have been made. There has been a drive to reduce violence and an Anti Social Behaviour policy has been introduced to manage prisoners more effectively. This includes bullying, damage, assault, threats, abuse, fights, racism and homophobia. When an incident occurs, an ASB book is opened. The number of books opened went up when this was introduced which demonstrated that staff are challenging such behaviour. One hundred and seventy books were opened in the initial period. The long term view was that this would reduce and in April May and June this year, the number of serious assaults fell to below Key Performance Targets.

ACCT

- The monthly average number of prisoners on ACCT Books during the reporting year was fifty.
- The Safer Custody team have trained personnel in North Wales (Bail Hostels and Probation) and supplied them with information on ACCT strategies. When ACCT prisoners are released, their care information is faxed to the organisation concerned so that there is a continuity of care.
- Activity packs containing playing cards, coloured paper, pencils and puzzles are being provided for prisoners on ACCT books, particularly for those in Healthcare. It has been established that these activities have a beneficial effect on these prisoners.
- Seven new ACCT assessors have been recruited and trained. This has increased the number of assessors to twenty six across the establishment. The team work on a weekly duty rota.
- The Birds of Prey are now used as an intervention within the ACCT process, in aiding and promoting mental health well-being. They are used as part of patients Care Plans, in a similar way to the use of other services and are seen as a therapeutic intervention. (See also Healthcare & Mental Health 5.3)

Deaths in Custody

There have been two self-inflicted deaths in custody during the reporting period. The inquests into these deaths are still to be held. The Board would wish to offer its condolences to the families of those concerned.

5.7 SEGREGATION, CARE AND SEPARATION

PSO 1700 is the base document used by the Board to monitor the Care & Separation Unit (CSU). A range of Board members attend CSU Review Boards on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, which ensures compliance with the 72hour Rule for R45/R49 GOOD prisoners. All prisoners held in the CSU are seen at least once per week by visiting Board members. In addition, should the establishment wish to place a prisoner who is also on an ACCT on CSU under 'exceptional circumstances' that is a matter which is subject to notification/discussion with the Board. It is worth noting that in the past the Board has attempted to obtain a definition of 'exceptional circumstances' from NOMS and has not been successful. However, in almost all cases we are looking at prisoners who are a danger to themselves, a danger to other prisoners and a danger to staff and however mentally or physically unwell, are often considered too volatile to be housed on the Healthcare Unit with other vulnerable prisoners.

The average number of prisoners held on the CSU is 15-18 (capacity of 22). Peaks and troughs are the norm - and are dependent on a wide range of variables.

As a Board, we continue to be impressed by the ability of CSU staff to deal with the most challenging of prisoners. However, there have been occasions when two, three or even four of the most challenging have had to be located on the CSU at the same time. This presents an almost impossible task and it is to the credit of the managers and staff that they maintain their humanity and professionalism in such circumstances. Thankfully, these situations are not too often or too long in duration.

Evidence of good practice

- The basic understanding that CSU is used only when absolutely necessary and for as short a time as possible, and the range of options attempted by senior management to ensure this ethos is maintained
- The good staff/prisoner relations, which enable a firm, humane and appropriate regime to be delivered to the most challenging
- The system of referrals to the District Judge, who attends the prison on a regular basis to undertake the external adjudications and who considers the system a template for good practice and the staff outstanding in the execution of their duties
- The establishment is fortunate in having continuity of approach from a highly experienced District Judge, respected by prisoners and staff alike
- Adjudication tariffs have been increased to draw attention to the drive on reducing violence within the establishment.

5.8 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Altcourse now holds an average of 1009 prisoners - 600 Adult Sentenced (with 37 over the age of 60) 250 Remand, 160 Young Offenders. Approximately 39 will be foreign nationals (3.8%). The young offenders are held mostly on remand or awaiting sentence. They cause a disproportionate amount of work for staff and are frequently represented on the CSU or on Basic Regime.

The prison has managed a reduction in requested places from a high of 1324 in December 2008 to the present maximum requirement of 1033.

Convicted enhanced prisoners now have a dedicated unit where they are granted a say in what should be provided and how the unit should be run. They have the privilege of being locked down at the end of the day one hour later than the rest of the establishment. The unit is effectively managed by the prisoners who are also responsible for its cleanliness.

- The newest unit, Foinavon, is all single cell, with a high percentage of those prisoners resident attending Vocational Training. It also houses the new Family Intervention Unit which facilitates a range of programmes designed to improve and support family relationships which inevitably suffer when the father is in custody. A dedicated unit for older prisoners is also planned and will be located on Foinavon.
- The prison has always had a unit for vulnerable prisoners (Reynoldstown Blue). Often oversubscribed, it has now been possible to designate a further vulnerable prisoner unit (Reynoldstown Brown), which is on the adjoining side of the house-block. This gives the unit management the opportunity to differentiate between the types of vulnerability and separate as appropriate. It has also had the effect of reducing the numbers of prisoners housed on CSU under R45/49 'own interest.'
- On the west side of the site Melling Unit houses Induction and Furlong Unit Detox' and IDTS.
- Sub-contractors Aramark hold the catering contract. Food quality can be variable on occasion, but is generally good as evidenced by a 33% reduction in applications to the Board. All prisoner servery workers undertake the basic hygiene course and the cleanliness of serveries is good, with some exceptionally good. Aramark are involved in a resettlement initiative. Together with G4S they fund 2 x 6 month contracts for prisoners who have worked in the kitchens at Altcourse and have completed their sentence. Work placements are in the North West.
- Prisoners get two cooked meals Monday to Thursday. Friday dinner is a hot meal, supper is sandwiches with chips. Breakfast packs are issued. At weekends brunch is served around 11.00am and the evening meal is sandwiches, cake, fruit and soup – all of which may 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, Monday to Thursday, one session on a Friday and two sessions at the weekend.

5.8.i Area of Concern

The visits booking section is extremely busy and if for any reason the normal complement of clerks is reduced, it very soon becomes an issue – with complaints to the main switchboard from callers. When raised by the Board the situation is rectified, but it would be preferable if strategies were put in place to alleviate the problem. A telephone call to the visits booking section is often the first contact with the establishment and as such an important first impression.

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

DRUG STRATEGY

(Policy meeting now combined with Security to accommodate overlap)

The prevention of illicit drugs coming into the establishment has been well documented in previous Annual Reports and continues to be a major challenge. Again, it is inextricably linked to security in terms of effective searching, effective physical barriers (netting of exercise yards) and the menace of the illegal mobile phones. The ability to block the signals of illicit mobile phones – held illegally within the prison - cannot be over emphasised. In the opinion of the Board it is just, it is right and it is long overdue.

Drug strategy work and initiatives continue to have a high priority within the prison. This service is delivered via the Carats team, IDTS, various Drug Recovery programmes, Counsellors and Alternative Therapies.

Intuitive Recovery is of particular note. It has been further refined recently and is therefore reported comprehensively below.

Intuitive Recovery is run by a contracted supplier using ex-drug users to deliver the 4 day intensive and non-drug intervention programme all via the Programmes Department at Altcourse.

- 4 day course Monday to Thursday mornings
- Any addiction – Drugs/Alcohol/Gambling (smaller)
- 3 courses per month
- Courses for long term prisoners Lifers/IPP's
- Constant Waiting List – between 100 and 120
- From the beginning of this Financial Year to date 75 courses
- Attendance by referral (self or others) - CARAT workers involvement encouraged
- VP Units attend separately
- East and West sides of the prison attend separately

If the course is successfully completed prisoners gain a certificate. After release there is a follow-up by the Intuitive Recovery Company. A Level 1 Award in Addictive Desire Recognition from the National Open College Network is then awarded.

External tutors have previously attended and passed the Intuitive Recovery course (Peer led). 3 ex-prisoners from Altcourse are now employed full time in the community by The Intuitive Recovery organisation

Pilot Scheme – An apprentice tutor, recruited from inside the prison, is involved in the delivery of the programme with a view to being fully qualified to teach the course on release. A prisoner has been given the challenge and is responding very well. If all continues as well as it has begun, the Intuitive Recovery Company intends to implement the pilot and use it as a model for the future. The prisoner involved was invited to attend an IMB Board Meeting and speak to the Board on his experience of the role. It was an excellent presentation, from someone who is growing in confidence and self belief.

Statistics - Intuitive Recovery has been in place in Altcourse for 2 years plus and to date 594 prisoners have completed the course. Those prisoners who are released are contacted by Intuitive Recovery for a post release questionnaire

IDTS

Continues to be effectively controlled and delivered to prisoners requiring this support. Good to note that all those undergoing treatment are either being maintained or reduced. On average there are about 108 prisoners 10% of the prison population on the programme compared to 15% last year. It is interesting to note that a non-opiate based medication is available as an alternative to Methadone and Subutex (Britlofex). It is a 12 day course, is proving extremely effective and is being fully encouraged by nursing staff. Initial evidence is that those who complete their detoxification on Britlofex remain drug free.

CARATS

The Carats Team (numbering 12) continues to be the main intervention for addressing drug use with some 350 prisoners representing 36% of the prison population who are supported through various activities and programmes.

Drugs misuse undoubtedly remains a major challenge and staff continue to work hard in tackling the supply problem and offering solution options to prisoners. 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. In conjunction with the drug and mobile phone issues the Board consider that the netting of **all** exercise yards would seem to make absolute sense.

6.2. SECURITY

(Policy meeting now combined with Drug Strategy to accommodate overlap)

Security both physical and procedural is critical to a well run and effective establishment. In this regard and during the preparation of this report a NOMS Security Audit took place. This is an annual audit under Internal Audit Assurance conducted by representatives from NOMS. The overall score was green and the breakdown was as follows – Searching 100%, Accounting and Supervision 98%, Escort and Bed watches 94%. The figures speak for themselves and reflect the level of professionalism present in this busy local prison.

- Security, drugs and illicit mobile phones are all very much interconnected and in response to a peak in the MDT figures in May the Security department undertook an intelligence led operation, the details of which are known to the Board but not shown in this public document. Suffice to say that the MDT figure for June is much reduced. A correlation is noted between high parcel finds and low MDT figures.
- The series of actions taken by the Security Department are known to the Board and cover a wide range of initiatives. It is the opinion of the Board that to itemise these actions in this Annual Report would be inappropriate and would dilute their effectiveness in the future.

6.2.i Area of Concern

The Board has been vociferous for many years and in many Annual Reports regarding the menace of illicit mobile phones. As predicted the phones have reduced in size and increased in the range of services which can be accessed. As technology regarding blocking equipment becomes more sophisticated, it would seem that the time is right to reconsider installing equipment which would render any illicit mobile phones in the establishment useless.

In conjunction with the above the Board considers that the netting of **all** exercise yards would seem to make absolute sense.

7. THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	2011	2012	2013
Recommended Complement of Board Members	20	20	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13	13	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	14	10	12
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	5	2	3
Number of members leaving within reporting period	4	6	1
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	520	562	594
Total number of segregation reviews held	106	120	146
Total number of segregation reviews attended	103	112	137
Date of Annual Team Performance Review / planned	25.5.11	23.5.12	10.10.13

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
A	Accommodation	39	28	9
B	Adjudications	25	6	2
C	Equality & Diversity	9	3	1
D	Education/employment/training	103	58	13
E	Family/visits	110	69	18
F	Food/kitchen related	23	21	7
G	Health related	130	98	67
H1	Property (Current establishment)	81	40	14
H2	Property (Transfers / in other establishment)	65	42	19
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping & Argos)	12	8	6
I	Sentence related	186	91	37
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	44	22	9
K	Transfers	69	41	17
L	Miscellaneous	159	89	34
Total number of applications		1055	616	253
Average per month		88	51	21
Percentage change on previous year (%)		-21	-42	-59
Confidential access to Chair		97	39	9
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		1141	654	594

The number of applications to the Board shows an ongoing reduction year on year. This is as a result of careful management. Routine queries are dealt with in the first instance by unit staff and thence by other appropriate internal procedures. They become a Board issue when the internal system has failed.

BOARD MATTERS

General Duties of the Board:

Applications
Attendance as observer with the external arbiter
Observation of internal adjudications
Attendance as observers at establishment committees (see list below)
Attendance at the Coroner's Court
Basic Regime monitoring
CSU review boards
Presentation of an induction programme to new prisoners
Weekly rota visits

Meetings attended by the Board:

PCT Partnership Meeting (now NHS Commissioning Board)	Safer Custody
Drug Strategy & Security	IMB Annual Conference
Equality and Inclusion	Contracted Prisons Chairs Meeting
	North West Area Chairs Meeting

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

This report is a compilation of individual entries from Altcourse Board members, in adherence to the template and with the direction from the Chair to concentrate on changes during the reporting year, any areas of concern and examples of good practice. The aim was to produce a shorter, more focused report, and to move away from the 'year in the life of' approach. However, that is easier said than done and in a large, busy, local prison a year is a long time! If we are to produce shorter more focused reports in the future, it is my opinion (with the greatest respect) that the template would need to be radically altered.

The big change during this reporting year, from a chairmanship perspective, has been the monitoring of the establishment as it implements reduced numerical requirements for prisoner places. As the Criminal Justice System moves towards non-custodial disposals, it is anticipated that this will be an ongoing element in the future, with resettlement taking a high priority. Altcourse, as an acknowledged 'working prison' with enviably high purposeful activity figures, is well placed to respond.

During this reporting year, we have welcomed a new Director, only the third to hold the title since the prison was opened in 1997. We have said goodbye and good luck to a long serving Director, who has been promoted to HMP Oakwood, taking with him our good wishes and a wealth of knowledge and experience from his time at Altcourse.

Altcourse is a good establishment with many positives – not least the quality of the staff, which is remarked upon by all our visitors without exception. As a Board in a good establishment, it is even more important that we are up to standard and that our work is effective if we are to retain the respect of the members of the establishment we monitor and fulfil our obligations to the prisoners. If/when we have legitimate concerns we need to be in a position to challenge from a position of knowledge and that knowledge takes time to assimilate.

The present team is second to none. They have responded to my every request in terms of attendance, broadening knowledge, covering for colleagues, giving honest assessments (without fear or favour) of whatever happens to be the current topic. I would not wish to be without any one of them – although I could do with a few more! I thank them all for their unstinting support and loyalty.

However, we would not be in the position we are in without the work of those who have gone before and I pay tribute to the firm foundations laid in the past. I would mention particularly Sheila Royle who was Chair for the first six months of this reporting year. Sheila has been an IMB member for some 24 years undertaking all the named positions on the Board, most more than once! She was a National Council member, Chair of the Healthcare Group and a tutor of many years standing. Before we 'allowed' her to 'escape to the country' we used her undoubted teaching skills to 'fast track' our 3 newest members – so her legacy lives on. Thank you Sheila.

Now, we move forward with confidence, with a good nucleus of members, willing and able to learn and with plans already in place to attract more keen and able candidates for the future.

**Eileen M Darbyshire - 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 & Through-Care 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
NFA	No Fixed Abode
NACRO	National Association for Care & Resettlement of Offenders
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
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>)