



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

at

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

for the period

JULY 2013 – JUNE 2014

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, 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 1133 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.

In the recent reconfiguration of the prison estate HMP Altcourse has been designated a Resettlement prison. Little to report at this stage, as the change related to the designation is in the very early stages.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.1 PARTICULAR ISSUES REQUIRING A RESPONSE

The potentially challenging issue of 'legal highs' is the cause of great concern to both the establishment and the Board. The establishment have acted strongly in terms of ensuring that prisoners and staff are fully informed of the risks. However, the Board would appreciate a response covering the wider issue of the definition of what is a 'legal high' – particularly citing the legal response of the Irish lawmakers - who four years ago introduced legislation in Ireland that bans the sale of all psychoactive (or brain altering drugs) and then exempts some, such as alcohol and tobacco (6.1i)

Complaints to the Board regarding medical prescribing policy remain high and it is pleasing to note that Healthcare have been given a place on the prisoner Induction Programme. As a result, it is hoped that prisoners will have a better understanding of the policy and the national requirements and guidelines. However, it has been highlighted to the Board that there are inconsistencies in prescribing practice between prisons i.e. a prisoner refused medication in one prison, may encounter a more 'relaxed' approach to prescribing in a neighbouring prison. The Board would appreciate a national overview on this issue. (5.4 Area of Concern)

4.2 PREVIOUS YEAR'S CONCERNS

The Board has raised on many occasions the lack of any shelter or access to toilet facilities for those, often including children and the elderly, waiting to collect prisoners on release from custody. Many have travelled long distances and the lack of a toilet facility is embarrassing - for those who have arrived by public transport there is no shelter. The Board considers this is an unfortunate first impression for visitors, which reflects badly on the caring ethos of the establishment and whilst understanding the resource implications hope this matter will be reconsidered.

In the last two Annual Reports the Board has raised concerns at the level of violence and the establishment's failure to perform against the KPT Serious Assaults target. Despite periods of improvement this has not been sustained and there is still work to be done in this critical area of operation. Board members are aware that a number of potential initiatives are being considered to be included in a revised strategy for violence reduction and will closely monitor the situation over the 2014-2015 reporting year.

4.3 ISSUES FOR THE DIRECTOR/G4S

The Board has been vociferous for many years and in many Annual Reports regarding the menace of illicit mobile phones and the need to deal with them in an effective manner by the best possible method – an update of the current position would be appreciated. (6.2i)

There is a need to ensure, on an ongoing basis, that prisoners located on the CSU have that to which they are entitled in terms of television or radio. A small, ongoing stock of basic radios, given that these are frequently damaged, would resolve the issue. (5.1 Area of Concern)

A number of issues relating to food and kitchen equipment have been raised by the Board and whilst considerable progress has been made, there remain issues of consistency. There is also a need to review what happens when the food arrives on the Unit. Incorrect handling at Unit level can result in cold food and avoidable complaints, which are outside the control of the contractors. (5.7vi and 5.7 Area of Concern)

4.4 OTHER ISSUES OF EXCELLENCE NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

- Staff on Healthcare continue to make creative use of the Birds of Prey as a therapeutic intervention, this highly effective initiative has been complemented by the introduction of Hives for Bees, with the hope that they will also prove effective in promoting mental health well-being.
- The appointment of a nurse with specialist skills in the healthcare of older prisoners.
- The appointment of a dual diagnosis nurse, with specialist skills in serious mental health issues/substance misuse
- A recent external audit of OMU (Offender Management Unit) rates the team performance for Public Protection as 97%, which highlights the fact that they are extremely effective at picking up on the relevant offenders.
- Welcomed by Altcourse for prisoners from North Wales, is a 24 hour mental help helpline, which offers emotional support, provides information/signposts and self-help leaflets free of charge to callers.
- The introduction by Programmes Department, of a Prisoner Passport in relation to psychosocial courses undertaken; these passports are an up to date, ongoing record of the activity undertaken by prisoners and as with passports of old are stamped as visible confirmation. This is an example of a well-focused initiative extremely popular with prisoners.
- The production of an internal prisoner magazine 'The Altcourse Bugle' – A5 size, approx. 14 pages long, produced by and for prisoners and containing information, advice, puzzles, poem of the month, cartoons etc. etc. An excellent read and a good source of prisoner information.
- 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 Building Insulation Treatments - External Wall Insulation. Preparations are underway for vocational training in construction.
- Initiatives relating to small commercial ventures i.e. sublimation printing and production of small wooden furniture
- In addition, there is available full progression to Level 2 Diploma via the Vocational Training Unit.

4.5 OVERALL JUDGEMENT

The overall judgement the Board has of HMP Altcourse is that it is generally a good establishment, with managers and staff working at full capacity on an ongoing basis. That does not mean, of course, that there is not room for improvement – there is; or conversely, that there are not areas of excellence – there are many such areas.

For example, at the same time as being concerned at the levels of violence, in a recent survey more than 80% of prisoners said they felt safe in the establishment. Board members are visible and working in all areas of the prison on a daily basis, sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs and feel safe and well supported. Statistics in relation to assaults and fights have shown that 50% involve young offenders, who only account for 15% of the prison population; these are facts that will be key elements in the revised strategy for violence reduction, which amongst other things will reconsider the way in which the establishment inter-acts with young offenders.

A Local Prison housing adults and young offenders (remand and sentenced) is one of the most challenging of environments. Many of those held are either at the beginning of their sentence, or held on remand pending court cases. Issues are unresolved, sentences are newly received and emotions are running high. Acceptance of their situations by many prisoners is at an early stage and requires careful management.

These issues have been further exacerbated by the issue of 'legal highs' and the number of prisoners, particularly young offenders, who have been involved in gangs prior to their imprisonment. The establishment is involved in intelligence led activity in both areas, which will be taken into consideration in the revised strategy for violence reduction.

Despite these challenges there is much excellent work being delivered on a daily basis. A selection of Areas of Excellence is listed in (4.4) with many others previously mentioned, still ongoing and not reiterated.

In summary, the prison on the whole provides a good service to those in its care and is committed to continuous improvement in the areas highlighted for attention.

5.1 CARE & SEPARATION UNIT

PSO 1700 is the base document used by the Board to monitor the Care and Separation Unit (CSU). A broad range of Board members attend CSU Review Boards on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, which ensures compliance with the 72 hour 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 on an ACCT on CSU under 'exceptional circumstances' that is a matter which is subject to notification to the Board. In these cases we are normally 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. This is a matter of judgment which is made and documented by a member of the Senior Management team.

The average number of prisoners held on the CSU is 15-17 (capacity 22). Peaks and troughs are the norm and are dependent on a wide range of variables.

Whilst the physical conditions on the CSU are clean and basic, there is nothing basic about the staff who work there. The Board continue to be impressed by the ability of the CSU staff to deal with the most challenging of prisoners with patience and a high level of professionalism.

Evidence of good practice

- 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 good fortune of the establishment 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.

Area of concern

A need to ensure, on an ongoing basis, prisoners located on the CSU have that to which they are entitled in terms of radio or television. A small stock of basic radios, given that these are frequently damaged, would resolve the issue. Inability to supply (on the basis of ordered but not yet received) is not in the opinion of the Board an appropriate response.

5.2 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

The Education Department has implemented a new curriculum to enhance the prisoner journey by meeting the needs of the offender. The delivery of Functional Skills Programmes in English, Maths and ICT continues. Manchester College now includes employability and workplace training across the curriculum. The department works closely with Resettlement. The Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative has been introduced and on release a prisoner could have a mentor to help him set up his own business. A Graphics package is being piloted to link in with this.

A full time Information, Advice and Guidance Worker is now in post together with a support worker.

- The Library has introduced a reading group which meets monthly.
- The prison has purchased a glasshouse which is now on site. Discussions about the delivery of horticultural courses are taking place with Manchester College.
- The prison now has a Call Centre which employs up to 16 prisoners who conduct surveys and work towards level 2 NVQ in Customer Service.
- The Engineering Workshop has additional sheet metal manufacturing work. Prisoners can achieve City and Guilds level 2 in Performing Manufacturing Operations. Other new contracts include the design and manufacture of dining furniture and the production of bedding for a local hospital and the manufacture of fencing panels for a housing trust.
- The Board is pleased to report that the number of teaching hours has been maintained this year. An additional 300 hours have been allocated to pilot 3 courses of a Family Intervention Programme. The first course is underway and incorporates opportunities to achieve nationally accredited qualifications in Employability and Personal Development.
- A range of prisoners' art work was selected and displayed at an exhibition at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral in November 2013

5.3 EQUALITY & INCLUSION

The Equality & Inclusion Action Team which meets bi monthly is invariably well attended by senior managers and representatives from all departments of the prison. It is pleasing to note that prisoner representatives play an active and valued role in these meetings. Current representation includes young adults, older prisoners and foreign nationals. There is a structured agenda covering all aspects of equality and inclusion and IMB members regularly attend the meetings. This year saw the establishment of a Prisoner Equality & Inclusion Group, meeting monthly and chaired by the Equality & Inclusion Manager. All G4S staff receive training in equality and inclusivity, for prison officers this is delivered within the first few days of starting their employment.

Race & Nationality

It is pleasing to note that over the year there has been a reduction in discrimination complaints. The number of BME prisoners remains constant at around 5% of the prison population, reflecting the demographic makeup of the community served by the establishment. A new initiative this year was the setting up of an Irish Travellers Group which meets fortnightly and is attended by Irish Community Care Merseyside.

Faith & Belief

In addition to offering a wide range of opportunities and activities for diverse faith groups to practice their respective religions, the Chaplaincy continues to lead on innovative programmes such as Restorative Justice and Mediation which are always popular and well attended.

Disability

It is disappointing that the issue of wheelchair access and adapted cells, highlighted in last year's report, has still not been progressed and this will continue to be monitored closely during the current year. However there is an expectation that prison officers will be aware of any additional needs of prisoners with disabilities and will ensure that those needs are duly met.

Age

An Older Prisoners Forum was established in May 2014 and a prisoner representative was appointed to liaise with all new prisoners over the age of fifty to assess their individual needs. Currently there are one hundred and twelve older prisoners at Altcourse.

Gay, Lesbian, Bi Sexual & Transgender

Although the overall number of complaints relating to sexual orientation remains low, there has been a slight increase over the previous year, which will be monitored by the Diversity & Inclusion Team. One transgender prisoner has been held at Altcourse during this year and we are pleased to report that considerable efforts have been made by the establishment to ensure that her reasonable needs are met. She has been able to attend education and personal development courses and access a suitable range of clothing and cosmetics.

5.4 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

This year has seen the introduction of the new Prison Health Commissioning arrangements and the establishment of a local Prison Health Partnership Board. The Board is made up of representatives from Justice Health Lancashire, Public Health England and Director/Governor Grades from Kennet, Liverpool and Altcourse prisons. The Partnership Board has spent time establishing terms of reference and debating representation. It may be some time before the benefits of a joint Board are felt by those involved as the populations and therefore health needs of the three prisons involved are very different.

However, some of the benefits of sharing information and learning from each other are being felt already e.g. the sharing of recommendations from a report regarding palliative care in HMP Liverpool and the difficulties experienced by one prison in introducing a bowel screening programme. Health needs assessments for all three prisons were undertaken in March/April this year. The results will form an action plan to be driven forward by this group. A representative of IMB Altcourse attends and monitors the Partnership Board meetings that are held at the three prisons on a rotational basis.

- A recent survey regarding the healthcare of older prisoners has been undertaken across the prison estate - Altcourse contributed to this survey. The survey highlighted the appointment of a nurse with specialist skills in healthcare of older prisoners at Altcourse – an example of good practice.
- With regard to the Healthcare in Patient Unit at Altcourse, prisoners are seen by an IMB member on a weekly basis. With few exceptions, prisoners on Healthcare speak highly of the care and treatment they receive from doctors, nurses and healthcare staff. This year the unit has had a major refurbishment and the temporary transfer of prisoner patients to an adjoining unit was achieved with minimum disruption to inpatients care and treatment.
- Staff on the unit continue to make creative use of the birds of prey to engage with prisoners requiring therapeutic intervention – e.g. one prisoner who presented major management issues throughout the prison has been successfully employed as a cleaner and servery worker on the Healthcare unit. Worthy of note is the professionalism in dealing with the particular challenges presented by a trans-gender prisoner who needed to be managed on the unit for security reasons, and the end of life care given to a long term prisoner who died of natural causes last year. Staff are required to manage on a routine basis, individuals with a range of serious health issues (including those with a terminal diagnosis), prisoners on ACCT and individuals awaiting transfer to specialist mental health facilities. Prison Carers are used extensively and effectively on the Healthcare unit.

Area of concern

Complaints about medical prescribing remain consistently high. However, the understanding of the Board is that prescribing is fully compliant with national guidelines. Healthcare has, this year, been

given a place in the Prisoner Induction process and it is anticipated that prisoners will now have a better understanding of the prison's prescribing policies and national requirements/guidelines. It has been highlighted to the Board that there is an inconsistency in prescribing practice between prisons i.e. a prisoner refused medication in one prison, may encounter a more 'relaxed' approach to prescribing in a neighbouring prison.

Mental Health

- The Mental Health In-Reach team gained an additional member of staff this year which has eased the pressure on high caseloads. The team aim to see all new referrals in 4 working days. In addition there has been the appointment of a specialist doctor in substance misuse and a nurse has been identified to take a lead for 'dual diagnosis' (mental health and substance misuse).
- The In-Reach team have recently undertaken a survey of prisoners' views about the service they receive. Although response rates were disappointing, prisoners did say that they would like more contact with individual team members and in addition have requested group therapy. They have also suggested a regular meeting between In-Reach 'clients' and Healthcare staff, but issues of confidentiality may make this idea impractical.

North Wales

In previous annual reports attention has been drawn to the lack of court liaison/diversion schemes in North Wales. This situation appears much improved. Also welcomed is a new initiative which will impact on Altcourse North Wales prisoners – a 24 hour mental health helpline, which offers emotional support, provides information/signposts and self-help leaflets free of charge to callers

5.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT (Incorporating Resettlement)

- This team works well together to cover all aspects dealing with sentenced prisoners
- One observation of a prisoner interview was particularly successful. The inmate was extremely angry and upset at being unable to see his children due to certain circumstances. He was irate and unsettled. The professionalism with which the staff dealt with him was impressive. His anger was dealt with on a professional level and he responded in a civil and respectful manner.
- Statistics have improved – and OASYS backlog has been reduced following concerns nationally. The team has taken the advice and guidance given nationally to improve performance.
- A recent external audit rates the team performance for Public Protection as 97% which highlights the fact that they are extremely effective in picking up on the relevant offenders.

5.6. PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

Altcourse is a Category B Local and Remand prison, designated a Resettlement prison in the recent reconfiguration of the prison estate.

- Unsentenced prisoners are not required to take part in purposeful activity, but are encouraged to do so. Should they decide not to participate they are placed behind their door during the main day activity periods and do 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 are purposefully employed and are working towards their own resettlement are eligible to be considered for enhanced level status.
- Sentenced prisoners are required to take part in purposeful activity and in accordance with the IEP scheme, cannot progress to Enhanced Status unless they are actively contributing to their own rehabilitation.

The average figure for purposeful activity over the whole population is 36.50 hours for Sentenced prisoners and 22.00 hours for Unsentenced and Young prisoners, with a number of prisoners working a 40 hour week.

The revised IEP scheme has been implemented during this reporting year, with the expected reduction in the number of prisoners qualifying for the more challenging Enhanced Level status. A 'snapshot' of the levels across the establishment is as follows –

Basic 60 Adult 24 Y/O - **Entry Level** 117 Adult 28 Y/O - **Standard** 652 Adult 72 Y/O
Enhanced 146 Adult 4 Y/O (based on an occupancy figure of 1103)

5.7 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Altcourse now holds an average of 1124 prisoners, a snapshot of one day shows: - 710 Adult Sentenced (with 38 over the age of 60) 280 Remand, 124 Young Prisoners. Approximately 41 will be foreign nationals (3.6%). The Young Prisoners are held mostly on remand or awaiting sentence. They are a challenging group, causing a disproportionate amount of work for staff and are frequently represented on the CSU or on Basic Regime.

- Convicted enhanced prisoners now have one side of a unit i.e. Canal Blue, 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. A dedicated unit for older prisoners is planned and will be located on Foinavon.
- The prison has 2 units for vulnerable prisoners (Reynoldstown Blue and Reynoldstown Brown). 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 number of prisoners housed on CSU under R45/49 'own interest.'
- On the west side of the site Melling Unit houses Induction and Furlong Unit many elements of Detox' including psychosocial and clinical elements, with a highly effective prisoner passport monitoring system. This involves challenging timescales with passports stamped and recognition given for completed sections of work. It has been incredibly well received and valued by prisoners.
- Sub-contractors Aramark hold the catering contract. Food quality is variable with a further marginal 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 2x6 month contracts for prisoners who have worked in the kitchens at Altcourse and have completed their sentence. Work placements are in the North West.
- The Board have highlighted on-going issues with kitchen equipment and the resultant reduction in the variety and quality of food delivered to prisoners. Progress has been made, but the exercise is not complete and consistency continues to be an issue.
- A recent Environmental Health Inspection on kitchen hygiene resulted in a Level 5 (highest) rating and a commendation for good practice.
- Prisoners have two cooked daily 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 flasks 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.

- Access to visits remains good, with two sessions Monday to Friday (plus legal visits each morning from 08.30-12.00). There are three sessions on Saturdays and four sessions on Sundays.

Area of concern

The Board do not underestimate the challenge of providing three meals a day for more than 1100 prisoners and there are issues of consistency (quality/quantity/temperature etc.) from time to time. These matters are raised via food comments books on the units and via the Board with senior management. Improvements have been made and more are ongoing.

The Board consider the role of the No.1 Servery Worker critical, if they were all 'as good as the best' that would represent real progress. If we also consider the time when the food leaves the kitchen in the heated trolley, to the time it is served to the prisoner - the Board is aware that there are issues involving the temperature of the food which relate to the serving routine on the unit, which are outside the control of Aramark.

5.8 SAFER CUSTODY

The dedicated Safer Custody team continue their efforts to ensure that HMP Altcourse is a safe prison for both prisoners and staff.

The greatest challenge facing this team is the increasing number of serious incidents of violence being reported in the prison. Work is in hand to review existing policy and develop new strategies based on research into the basic causes of the increase in violence.

Strategies and Initiatives

- There are now six Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) and their duties include not only liaison with families of prisoners who die in custody, but also families of prisoners with problems such as illness, when it is felt that liaison with family would help.
- There has been a reduction of 4 in the number of full time Carers compared with the last reporting year. Efforts are being made to recruit more to bring the number up to 15. The number of part-time Carers is 5, as last year.
- The provision of additional Care Suites is proving to be beneficial in helping vulnerable prisoners.
- A list of the names and telephone numbers of ten external organisations offering support to prisoners is displayed on all units. The list also includes the internal number for the Safer Custody Helpline which is an answering service that goes directly to the Safer Custody team.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of ASB (Anti Social Behaviour) books opened during the reporting year and consideration has been given to the effectiveness of the Basic Regime.
- Analysis of incidents of assaults and fights has shown that 50% involve Young Offenders who only account for 15% of the prison population. This information will be taken into account in developing new strategies aimed at reducing violence in the prison.
- Positive feedback from prisoners regarding their experience of the SORI course, with one prisoner saying "It has been the best course I have ever done in all my time in custody."

Area of Concern

The Board is concerned that the number of serious assaults has continued to rise during the reporting year. However the prison is treating the reduction of violence as a matter of urgency. The Safer Custody team are fully aware of the situation and a number of potential initiatives are being

considered to be included in a revised strategy for violence reduction. The Board will closely monitor this situation over the 2014 -2015 year.

The Board notes an increase in gang culture and the increase in violence that is part and parcel of that culture, particularly with regard to young offenders.

ACCT

- The number of ACCT books opened in the reporting year remains the same as in the previous year. However, there has been an increase in the number opened in Admissions - the highest compared with all other areas of the prison.
- Individual Support Plans for prisoners on ACCT books who are not considered at risk of self harming.
- There have been a number of incidences where the Post Closure Interview required in the ACCT procedures has been incomplete. To avoid this happening in the future, all Post Closure Interviews will be conducted by a member of the Safer Custody team.
- Hives of Bees have been introduced into the prison and it is hoped that these will complement the Birds of Prey as intervention in the ACCT process in promoting mental health well-being.

Deaths in Custody

There has been one self-inflicted death in the prison during the reporting year – this is the subject of an ongoing Coroner’s Inquest. The Board extends its condolences to the family and friends of the person concerned.

There have been two deaths by natural causes in the prison during the reporting year; to date no inquests have been held relating to these deaths. There are two outstanding inquests in relation to self-inflicted deaths in the prison during the previous reporting year.

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

6.1 DRUG STRATEGY

The prevention of illicit drugs coming into the establishment has again proved challenging. Although detection rates are high the amount of drugs entering the prison appears to remain fairly constant. This has been aggravated with the increased use of ‘legal highs’. These synthetic cannabinoids are becoming problematic across the prison estate. These substances can be more potent than cannabis and very small quantities can cause an overdose. A number of these ‘legal highs’ contain ingredients (such as Black Mamba), which are controlled substances and class B drugs. However, they are being manufactured at such a rate that many contain synthetic cannabinoids which are currently legal to possess. These ‘legal highs’ are unauthorised substances in prison, but current legislation does not allow for testing under MDT rules. Intelligence indicates, quantities are finding their way into prison via visits, parcels are being thrown into the exercise yard and in some cases prisoners are paid to return to custody with the substances secreted. As part of the strategy to address the issues of ‘legal highs’ Altcourse have produced a staff presentation (with accompanying leaflet) to highlight what they look like, how they are used, potential effects on prisoners, signs to watch for, legal standpoints and potential security concerns. Booklets are provided to prisoners in admissions explaining the dangers of the drugs but the increased use is a major cause for concern as it is understood that prisoners are being ‘paid’ to try out various substances

Parcels finds have remained constant throughout the year with a peak during December and an average of nearly 2 packages a day being found at various points throughout the prison. Previous Annual Reports have stated it is the opinion of the Board that all exercise yards should be netted.

If the battle against drugs and illicit mobile phone usage is to be won the netting of all exercise yards would, in the opinion of the Board, be a useful addition.

Gangs and the rise of a gang culture in prisons should come as no surprise. This can affect the stability of establishments, but close liaison with the police and their intelligence can help minimise the risk. Prison staff at Altcourse liaise closely with the police and the resultant information is helping the establishment to keep gang members and rival gangs apart.

Last year we reported in detail on the Intuitive Recovery programme which has continued in popularity over the last 12 months. Currently there is a waiting list of over 60 prisoners with 96 having completed the course so far this year. This is an increase of over 25% over the previous period. The courses are run by ex-drug users and again apprentice tutors are recruited from within prison. The Substance Misuse team (formerly CARATS) remain at the forefront in developing strategies to assist prisoners and currently there is an average of 30 prisoners per week supported through the various activities. Programmes Department, concentrating on psychosocial interventions recently introduced the A-Z programme. This programme identifies prisoners who do not engage in the regime, deny their offence, or refuse any interventions including education and work. It is not offence focused and is designed to motivate offenders to change their offending behaviour, by evaluating their lives and formulating goals to reduce the likelihood of re-offending on release. Worthy of mention is the Prisoner Passport system, initiated by Programmes as part of the effective monitoring of the psychosocial work undertaken with/by prisoners (See also 5.7 Residential Services). Recently introduced and receiving excellent reports from probation is TSP (Thinking Skills Programme). This is a seven week programme targeted at violent offenders. It is not available to all prisoners and is only suitable to those who exceed a score of 25 on the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS3).

6.2 SECURITY

As stated in previous reports security, drugs and mobile phones are all interrelated and remain a constant challenge. Although total parcel finds remain fairly constant there is an upward trend of mobile phone finds increasing by around 30% for the first 6 months of this year compared to the previous 6 months. The Board have emphasised previously the need for mobile phone signal blocking and the netting of all exercise yards and the increase in mobile phone finds continues to support this opinion.

As technology moves forward there are concerns that parcel sizes are becoming smaller and therefore easier to import and distribute. There are details known to the Board in this respect, which it is not considered appropriate to highlight in this Public Document.

Areas of concern

Mobile phones (with the obvious impact they have on the organisation and timing of illegal activities) plus 'legal highs', with all the potentially lethal consequences they cause, are major areas of concern for the Board.

7. THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	2012	2013	2014
Recommended Complement of Board Members	20	16	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13	10	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	10	12	12
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	2	3	3
Number of members leaving within reporting period	6	1	3
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	562	594	603
Total number of segregation reviews held	120	146	156
Total number of segregation reviews attended	112	137	144
Date of Annual Team Performance Review / planned	23.5.12	10.10.13	23.10.14

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
A	Accommodation	28	9	7
B	Adjudications	6	2	9
C	Equality & Diversity	3	1	1
D	Education/employment/training	58	13	26
E	Family/visits	69	18	15
F	Food/kitchen related	21	7	5
G	Health related	98	67	57
H1	Property (Current establishment)	40	14	10
H2	Property (Transfers / in other establishment)	42	19	24
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping & Argos)	8	6	3
I	Sentence related	91	37	30
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	22	9	13
K	Transfers	41	17	4
L	Miscellaneous	89	34	30
Total number of applications		616	253	234
Average per month		51	21	20
Percentage change on previous year (%)		-42	-59	-8
Confidential access to Chair		39	9	13
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		654	594	939

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 to satisfy the prisoner.

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:

NHS Commissioning Board
Drug Strategy & Security
Equality and Inclusion
Safer Custody
IMB Annual Conference
North West Area Chairs Meeting

National/Regional Responsibilities:

National Healthcare Working Group
(1x member of Altcourse IMB appointed to this Group)

Independent Interviewer
(1x member of Altcourse IMB a member of this Group)

Training & Development Strategy Group
(1x member of Altcourse IMB served on this Group)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

In editing and collating this Annual Report, my request to fellow Board Members was to report by exception - to concentrate on matters that were new, issues causing concern and evidence of good practice. In general terms I feel that we have achieved that goal. Although inevitably areas reported on vary in length and weight of content.

For example, the section on Healthcare begins with a concise analysis of the introduction of the new Prison Health Commissioning arrangements and the establishment of a local Prison Health Partnership Board; all new and all relevant to clear understanding. We are fortunate that one of our members is a member of the National IMB Healthcare Group and is able to give a national perspective to our knowledge of the issues.

In addition, the section on Drug Strategy includes necessary detail and depth of reporting on the subject of 'legal highs' an element of very real concern in this reporting year, which did not receive a mention last year! In accepting that behaviour in prison is, in part, a reflection of behaviour in the wider community, the Board finds the 'fashion' of 'legal highs' a challenging development. The response of the establishment to this issue is worthy of note, with a presentation to all staff on the subject and information to prisoners on Admissions explaining the dangers.

In undertaking our monitoring duties a good, professional relationship with staff and managers is critical. I feel that we have that relationship and that it is ongoing. In a Local Prison with a high level of 'churn' – say an average of 80 movements per day in and out, I continue to be impressed with the knowledge officers retain in relation to individual prisoners and the way they are able to recall that information when questioned. Altcourse is indeed fortunate in the quality of its staff.

My time at Altcourse comes to an end on 31.12.2014 under the national tenure arrangements negotiated with the Office of Public Appointments (which is now the governing body for IMB's). It has been quite a ride, sometimes bumpy, sometimes frustrating, often rewarding but always challenging and interesting. The objective I set myself when I took the chair was to leave the Board in good heart, with the people, knowledge and skills to move forward with confidence. Time will tell if I have been successful.

However, there is one element where I certainly have not met my own target – that of attracting new candidates to the role of IMB member. It was never easy and has become more difficult of late. It is not work experience; it is a public appointment with responsibilities for the monitoring of some of the most vulnerable and challenging members of society. We need to find a better way of attracting candidates with time, commitment, interest and integrity, who are prepared to learn and gain experience in undertaking this important role – which incidentally is unpaid. Not a lot to ask I hear you say!!!

In taking my leave of Altcourse, I thank my colleagues for their loyalty and support, I thank managers and staff for their unfailing courtesy and I remember many interviews with prisoners when they have trusted me to do the best I could to deal with a matter on their behalf. Not always possible to obtain the outcome they would have liked – but always possible to try. And when the response was "Nice one Miss" it really was all worthwhile!

**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>
CRC's	Community Rehabilitation Companies
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

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>)