



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

at

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

for the period

JULY 2014 – JUNE 2015

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) hold 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. It is currently designated a Resettlement Prison.

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 detention of an increasing number of prisoners with serious mental health issues presents significant challenges for the prison. Recent years have seen a rise in the numbers of prisoners transferring to secure beds in mental health units but invariably there are delays in initial diagnosis and thereafter in securing a place in the appropriate unit. Concerns are exacerbated by the difficult and often violent behaviour of those individuals which results in their detention in the CSU. The prison mental health In-Reach team and the visiting forensic psychiatrist suggest that this is not just a local issue and there have been occasions when there have been no medium secure beds nationally.

Another issue of concern to the Board, and the subject of an increasing number of applications, is missing property when prisoners are transferred into the prison from another establishment. Often prisoners will have been moved several times before they arrive at Altcourse and their property does not always follow them. This is frustrating for both prisoners and the staff who are charged with resolving the situation.

4.2 PREVIOUS YEAR'S CONCERNS

The serious concerns caused by the presence of New Psychoactive Substances highlighted in last year's report remain despite robust efforts by the establishment to make staff and prisoners fully aware of the dangers. The Board will continue to monitor closely the strategies and initiatives put in place to manage this escalating problem and would welcome further Government intervention to bring the situation under control nationally.

Complaints regarding medical prescribing and apparent inconsistencies between practices in different establishments within the prison estate also remain but the Board are satisfied that prescribing at Altcourse continues to follow NICE guidelines.

4.3 ISSUES FOR THE DIRECTOR/G4S

The Board is concerned about the numbers of prisoners held within the CSU for long periods of time, particularly those with serious mental health issues held there under exceptional circumstances.

The delivery of education in Healthcare is intermittent with teaching staff only attending on request.

The adaptation of cells for wheelchair use, reported upon last year, has not proved possible yet the Board is aware of the increasing numbers of older prisoners within the establishment, many of whom are wheelchair dependant.

Pressure for space on the dedicated vulnerable prisoners unit has resulted in some prisoners having to remain on normal location for longer than is desirable or, in the alternative, be housed within the CSU. Neither situation is ideal.

Although many of the Board's concerns about food quality and quantity have been addressed this year, it is disappointing to note that lack of timely maintenance and repairs to kitchen equipment have impacted adversely upon the catering arrangements.

4.4 OTHER ISSUES OF EXCELLENCE NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

- Creative use is made of the Birds of Prey and the Bee Hives as a therapeutic intervention in the care and treatment of vulnerable prisoners and those with mental health problems.
- Prisoners housed in the Care and Separation Unit now have access to education provided by Manchester College. Courses available include Maths, English, History and Art and take up has proved very positive. In addition the Board are pleased to note the improved ambience of the CSU exercise yard, with the provision of some basic exercise equipment and the mural painted by a prisoner from another unit.
- Whilst the housing within the CSU of some prisoners with severe mental health issues continues to be of concern to the Board we are mindful of the professionalism and compassion shown to those prisoners by management and staff on the unit.
- The Board are pleased to note and endorse HM Inspectorate of Prisons assessment of the provision of education and skills across the prison as good with the standard of art rated as outstanding.
- The relaunching of the Prisoner Engagement Council (PEC) which meets monthly has given prisoners a welcome opportunity to air their views and raise issues of concern. It is seen as a positive step forwards in the violence reduction strategy.
- The Board is gratified to note the enhanced work being carried out within the prison to support young offenders. In particular the establishment of the Young Adult Support Scheme (YAST) which allocates mentors to prisoners aged 18-21 to provide guidance and support from the time they arrive at Altcourse. It is pleasing to see the fruits of this endeavour in the reduction in the numbers of young prisoners involved in violent incidents.
- The Family Intervention Programmes, offering a variety of workshops in lifestyle management, thinking skills, mediation and First Aid provide an excellent opportunity for prisoners with families to review their offending within the context of the effect upon their loved ones.

4.5 OVERALL JUDGEMENT

The overall judgement of the Board is that HMP Altcourse is generally a good establishment, with managers and staff continuing to work at full capacity to provide a good service to those in its care. That said there will always be challenges and room for improvement.

Violence will always be of concern in a prison establishment, as elsewhere, but Board members are visible and working in all areas of the prison on a daily basis, sometimes alone, and feel safe and well supported. A Local Prison housing adults and young offenders (remand and sentenced) is one of the most challenging and volatile of environments. The problem of 'legal highs' and the number of mobile phones which find their way into the establishment exacerbate the situation. The Board continue to believe that the deployment of telephone blockers to disrupt such activity would do much to alleviate matters.

5.1 CARE & SEPARATION UNIT

PSO 1700 is the base document used by the Board to monitor the Care and Separation Unit (CSU). Board members attend CSU Review Boards on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and

efforts are made to attend those reviews held on a public holiday. Special attention is given to any prisoner in CSU who is on an ACCT under 'exceptional circumstances'. All prisoners held in the CSU are seen at least once a week by visiting Board members. In addition a weekly check is made with CSU managers on anyone who has been on the unit for more than one month to confirm their continued need to be in the unit.

Internal adjudications are held most days of the week and Board members observe a sample of these. External adjudications are held monthly by a visiting District Judge and a Board member will invariably attend. The Board is satisfied that both adjudications and review boards are held appropriately with fair outcomes.

The average number of prisoners held on the CSU is 19 (capacity 22). Numbers will vary but it is unusual for the unit to house numbers significantly below capacity. However the Board is pleased to note that senior managers conducting the reviews demonstrate a robust approach when examining the issues giving rise to a prisoner's continuing detention.

A number of changes in the CSU have occurred over the period of this annual report. Prisoners are now given access to education, provided by Manchester College, and can follow courses in Maths, English, History and Art. Take up is high and has been positively received. Efforts have been made to improve the exercise yards with one out of the three now being provided with exercise equipment and a mural painted by a prisoner from another unit. Until recently all CSU prisoners wore red but this has now been changed to the regulation grey so they are not so immediately visible within the prison. The Board has continued to be impressed by the attitude and professionalism of all CSU staff in dealing with frequently challenging prisoners compassionately and with dignity.

Area of concern

The continuing high number of prisoners held on CSU, some for long periods of time and the detention of those with complex mental health problems whose behaviour renders them not suitable to be housed in healthcare.

5.2 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

During this year Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons reported that learning, skills and work provision at Altcourse were good. The use of peer mentors to support prisoners across the provision was rated excellent and the standard of Art was considered to be outstanding. Prisoners have the opportunity to gain City & Guilds qualifications in Art. They are fortunate to have the services of a committed and innovative Art tutor who has succeeded in persuading artists and Art gallery staff to visit the prison to deliver workshops to students.

- The Board is pleased to report that regular education is now offered in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU). A designated tutor attends each weekday morning. Prisoners are able to work towards qualifications or develop their skills in Literacy, Numeracy, History and Art. The programmes of learning can continue on return to normal location. Despite the population in the unit constantly changing the uptake has been consistently high with numbers engaging in education reaching 92%. Examinations have been facilitated on this unit with successful outcomes.
- The Motor Vehicle Workshop has reopened offering vocational training in car maintenance. Prisoners work towards the Institute of Motor Industry level one qualification in Live Vehicle Maintenance.
- A Business Enterprise initiative in printing has been established as a part of Creative Digital Technologies. Any profit is used to fund the computer courses.
- All prisoners, with the exception of those in CSU, have the opportunity to visit the prison library twice weekly. In CSU books are ordered and sent over for the prisoners. Library staff are in discussion with Liverpool City Library regarding future access to their e-library in order to increase the number and range of books available to prisoners. A study of

borrowing trends has been undertaken and work is in progress to remodel the library area and encourage more prisoners to use the facility.

- The number of teaching hours has increased to 30,000 during this reporting year.

Area of concern

The delivery of education in Healthcare is intermittent. Teaching staff attend only on request.

5.3 EQUALITY & INCLUSION

The Equality & Inclusion Action Team meets bi monthly. Prisoner representatives play a valued role but currently there is only a foreign national representative with vacancies for older prisoner and young adult representatives. The Prisoner Equality and Inclusion Group also meets monthly and a number of prisoner representatives are engaged with this group. IMB members regularly attend both meetings. All G4S staff receive training in equality and inclusivity, for prison officers this is delivered within the first few days of their employment.

Race & Nationality

It is pleasing to note that over the year there has been a further reduction in discrimination complaints. Over 90% of the prison population identify themselves as White British with only 5% from BME groups, reflecting the demographic make-up of the community served by a local establishment. Currently only 7 prisoners identify themselves as Irish Travellers. In May this year there were 47 Foreign National Prisoners from 22 countries of origin. Small numbers and such a diverse base pose problems in identifying any specific needs.

Faith & Belief

In addition to offering a wide range of opportunities & 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. The Muslim community remains small (currently around 40) and the largest single religious group is Roman Catholic.

Disability

Adapting cells for wheelchair use, highlighted in last year's report, has not been found to be possible. However there appears to be adequate provision for the individual wheelchair users housed in the prison. The prison has a number of 'transit' wheelchairs for those not requiring a permanent chair but have mobility issues moving around the prison estate. The highest number of those declaring a disability relates to learning difficulties and care is given to ensure the needs of this group are met.

Age

The number of older prisoners has remained constant since last year, 10% of the prison population. However as the largest number is in the 50-59 year age group many don't identify themselves in this category. The majority (particularly those over 70) are housed on the Vulnerable Prisoners unit. Young adults, those between 18 and 21, make up 19% of the prison population.

Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

Numbers of those identifying themselves as gay or bisexual are very low (currently 4 and 5) with few issues of concern arising.

5.4 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

In March of this year Altcourse created a new Healthcare management structure with two new lead posts of a clinical manager and a practise manager bringing Altcourse into line with other North West prisons.

Another recent development has been the introduction of a separate system for prisoner Healthcare requests and complaints, ensuring improved confidentiality.

The 12 bedded inpatient unit continues to manage and care for a diverse number of challenging individuals, ranging from those with serious mental health problems to prisoners receiving palliative

care. Currently the inpatient unit houses 3 prisoners confined to wheelchairs who might otherwise be managed on normal location but for the limited number of 'disabled' cells.

Following the introduction of the Care Act in April, the prison has identified lead individuals, including the Healthcare manager, to liaise with the Local Authority. All prisoners held on the inpatient unit have been referred for a social care needs assessment. A Welsh Care Act has not been introduced so this will lead to inequalities of service for Welsh prisoners held at Altcourse.

The new clinical manager has recently introduced a new triage system. Although in its early stages this new system should start to have an impact on current waiting lists.

The prison has recognised that it needs to build links with Macmillan Nursing to enhance palliative care.

A senior nurse now attends the newly re-established Prisoner Engagement Council which allows prisoners the opportunity to raise concerns directly with healthcare staff.

Area of concern

It has recently come to the Board's attention that the contracted Optician has not attended the prison since January. The Director has been made aware of the situation and is seeking to resolve the matter urgently.

Mental Health

- The last year has seen a number of pressures on the prison with regard to prisoner's mental health. Abuse of NPS has had a significant impact in that it is proving more difficult for healthcare staff and the In Reach team to distinguish between those prisoners who may have used such substances leading to disturbed behaviour and those who may be suffering from a genuine mental disorder. A number of such prisoners have proved difficult and disruptive on the healthcare unit. Healthcare staff have an excellent relationship with the CSU and on occasions such prisoners have been transferred for short periods to the CSU to provide respite for both inpatients and staff on Healthcare. The IMB are regularly invited to attend and monitor reviews of such prisoners.
- During this reporting year the number of incidents of self-harm has remained largely unchanged from last year, with an overall reduction of 27.
- Recent years have seen a rise in the number of prisoners transferring to secure beds in mental health units. At the time of writing 7 seriously unwell prisoners are awaiting such beds and already 13 have been transferred between January and June of this year. We understand that this is not just a local issue and there have been occasions when there have been no medium secure beds nationally.
- Discussions have taken place with the In Reach team and the visiting forensic psychiatrist about these increased pressures. They suggest that the changing in commissioning arrangements for secure beds and the reduction in resources available to local mental health services and 'diversion' teams may have impacted on the numbers of severely unwell prisoners and in particular those requiring transfer. Despite these pressures the mental health In Reach team are impressive in their calm and professional approach.

5.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT (Incorporating Resettlement)

- The new Community Rehabilitation Contracts (CRC) for which OMU has been preparing, were introduced on May 1st. CRCs are responsible for managing short term sentences and supporting the relevant people on licence. OMU still works closely with Probation both internally and externally. National Probation Service is responsible for the management of high risk offenders. CRCs are responsible for the management of those offenders who are not deemed high risk and for the preparation of their resettlement plans prior to release.

- All offenders now have a Basic Custody Screening (BCS) which comes under the remit of OMU and is the first part of the re-settlement plan. The second part is undertaken by the CRC.
- Each offender must be seen by OMU within 72 hours for their BCS. The latest assessment demonstrates that since the start in February, over 90% have been seen within the time frame. However this statistic is not the whole story. If an offender refuses to engage, or if they are in court or admitted to Healthcare an explanation can be recorded but these count in the statistics and so it is difficult to see how 100% can be achieved considering these unavoidable occurrences.
- The recent introduction of a new computer system (CMS) allows the team to contact prisoners on the unit to make appointments and this is proving effective. The team has set up a FAQ section on CMS. This innovation helps staff efficiency and time management by giving them the facility to answer generic questions without frequent repetition and also to respond to individuals who have concerns which in turn alleviates unnecessary worries over communication and information sharing.

5.6. PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

There has been an ongoing review of purposeful activity in the prison. Two focus groups from the general prison population and the vulnerable prisoner unit have met and a mandatory survey has been completed by all prisoners. Prisoner views have been considered when developing strategies to encourage increased participation in education.

All sentenced prisoners are required to take part in purposeful activity. There is no such requirement for un-sentenced prisoners but they are strongly encouraged to participate. Altcourse offers sufficient full time and part time activity places to accommodate the prison population. The regime in the workshops aims to develop a work ethic to match that required in the job market. There is a good variety and range of education and vocational training

- Purposeful activity is monitored on a weekly basis. Sentenced prisoners are required to undertake 36.5 hours per week and the weekly target for un-sentenced and young prisoners is 22 hours. A number of prisoners who are employed in the workshops work a 40 hour week.
- When they are not at work, in education or participating in programmes, prisoners have regular access to the prison library and the gym. Some prisoners look after the birds of prey or the bees.
- A small number of prisoners do not attend education, training or work. These include older prisoners past the age of retirement, new arrivals to the prison who are placed on the unemployed list and are undergoing induction, prisoners in their first week of demotion to Basic Regime, prisoners who are resident in Healthcare, those attending court and those who refuse to engage.

5.7 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

- Altcourse holds an average of around 1100 prisoners. A snapshot of one day shows 1107 with 217 aged 18 to 21 and 30 over 60. Young prisoners have been involved in a disproportionate number of incidents of violence and throughout this year the senior management team have made determined efforts to reduce this.
- The Incentive and Earned Privileges scheme was revised during the year and a detailed points tariff provides greater clarity. There is no longer a designated unit for enhanced prisoners.

- The newest unit, Foinavon, is all single cell with a high percentage of prisoners residing there attending Vocational Training. The quality of training in these workshops is high. Foinavon Green has been designated as a dedicated unit for older prisoners with 60 to 70% being over 50.
- Reynoldstown Brown and Blue are designated as units for vulnerable prisoners. Pressures for space can cause problems and some VPs are not able to get a place promptly and are housed in CSU under Rule 45/49 'own interest' whilst waiting for a space to become available.
- On the west side of the prison Melling Brown houses induction prisoners and Furlong Red acts as the Detox unit with a mixture of psychosocial and clinical interventions.
- Over the year an automated IT system called N-Force has been introduced. A kiosk with a touch screen terminal has been installed in each unit providing a self-service provision for prisoners. This system facilitates menu selection, booking visits, and the purchase of goods. There is an information board and a schedule of where prisoners are, i.e. work, education, and visits. The system has proved popular and additional services are planned to be introduced. The other side of this system is the Custodial Management System (CMS) which provides a range of management information.
- Sub-contractors Aramark hold the catering contract. Food quality, quantity and temperature can be variable but there have been fewer complaints made to the Board in recent months, due in part to a change in the timing of when food is served. The kitchen manager and her deputy regularly engage with prisoners regarding menus and concerns. All special diets are catered for reflecting both religious and dietary requirements. Aramark also run the shop from which prisoners can order their "canteen" and a catering facility in the visits hall.
- The Board has previously highlighted on-going issues with the maintenance of kitchen equipment and unfortunately this remains the case. However the trolleys transporting food around the prison have been largely repaired or replaced.
- A positive development over the year has been the relaunching of the Prisoner Engagement Council (PEC). This monthly meeting is attended by prisoner reps from all units and prison management. Aramark and Healthcare regularly attend to answer questions from prisoners and prisoners have the opportunity to request the presence of management from any area. It is believed prisoners see this as a credible forum as it gives them a voice and a chance to have concerns addressed. It is seen as one strand of reducing violence and a zero tolerance to violence and poor behaviour is stressed and the co-operation of reps in this requested.

Areas of concern

- Pressure on places in the VP unit.
- Lack of timely repairs to kitchen equipment.

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 challenges to reduce incidents of violence highlighted in

previous reports remain but the Board is pleased to note that new initiatives and strategies developed during the reporting period are beginning to bear fruit.

Strategies and Initiatives

- There has been an increase in the overall number of carers, bringing the numbers to 17 full time and 3 part time carers, who continue to provide an excellent service to vulnerable prisoners at Altcourse.
- Nominated multi-disciplinary staff are responsible for working closely with prolific self-harmers.
- A list of names and telephone numbers of external organisations offering support to prisoners as well as a dedicated internal number for the safer Custody Helpline is displayed on all units.
- A new Violence Reduction Strategy was introduced in February of this year, supported by monthly meeting chaired by the Director or Deputy Director. Every incident of violence is investigated using a Violence Investigation Report which encourages managers to explore in some depth the underlying causes behind the incident. It is hoped that targeted interventions currently being developed will address concerns.
- ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) books have been replaced with Supervision Logs to encourage improved case management.
- A significant step forward in tackling the behaviour of young offenders, raised as a concern in previous reports, was introduced in February of this year with the Young Adult Support Team (YAST). This is a peer led intervention which begins at Induction when young prisoners, between the ages of 18 and 21, are taken under the wing of mentors as soon as they arrive at Altcourse. It is pleasing to note that this initiative is already proving successful in the reduction of the numbers of young prisoners involved in incidents of violence. The PCO responsible for its development has been nominated for a Butler Trust Award.

ACCT

- The number of ACCT books opened in the reporting year remains similar to the previous year, with a high number being opened in Admissions. This is regarded as a positive measure with early intervention offering additional support to vulnerable prisoners from the time of entry into the prison.
- All post closure reviews for prisoners on ACCT books are carried out by the unit manager and subject to a weekly audit by the Safer Custody Team.
- The Birds of Prey and hives of bees are continuing to prove beneficial in complementing the therapeutic care of prisoners on ACCT books.
- The Board are pleased to note that this year the Safer Custody Team have been awarded a Substantial rating in two NOMS Audits for their provision of care.

Deaths in Custody

There have been four deaths in custody in the prison during this reporting year and a number of Board members have attended the Coroner's Court for Inquests.

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

6.1 DRUG STRATEGY

Whilst it is pleasing to note the success of substance misuse programmes the presence of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) raises significant concerns. This is an increasing problem in both society and prisons. It is reported that there are tens of thousands of variations of the substances and as these are easily modified it makes detection very difficult. NPS is fast becoming the drug of choice and one "bi-product" of the increased use is the decline of traditional drug use which may

also be the reason for the drop in positive tests in the MDT and VDT programmes. Drug finds within Altcourse support the steady increase in the use of NPS.

At Altcourse several preventative strategies have been introduced including leaflets and visuals to prisoners, visitors and staff. Consideration has been given to holding “surgeries” on the units but shortage of resources makes this challenging especially as additional patrols have been mounted.

Although no incidents have been reported there is also the danger of “passive” drug use by officers entering a cell where drugs have recently been smoked and staff members have been advised of the correct course of action.

The Board welcomes recent and proposed NPS legislation but the fear is this may in fact drive the drugs underground making it even more important that successful detection methods are introduced.

The Board believes part of the answer for improved detection is through increased random searching of visitors and staff and the possible introduction of body scanners. However it would appear that access to these substances is directly linked to the illicit use of mobile phones which are smuggled into the prison and are used to organise “deliveries”. As has been reported previously it is imperative that telephone blockers are employed within the estate to disrupt any activity.

6.2 SECURITY

During the current reporting year a new Head of Security was appointed and a new post of Security Intelligence Manager established which, along with an increase in the number of residential managers, has enhanced management visibility throughout the establishment.

Improved security measures have been put in place in all workshops involving searches, management of stock and waste, work allocation and risk management. Lockdown searches continue to be an important feature of safety. Improvements have been made to the Basic Regime and IEP scheme and Violence Management policies and procedures were reviewed to ensure ‘Best Practice’. Parcel finds are rising due to the more regular roof checks and the increased visibility of staff monitoring open areas.

The prison has focused on improving security and safety. Recent analysis of statistics demonstrates that this calendar year, assaults against staff and prisoners have decreased. Since December 2014 the number of serious incidents has also decreased and to April this year there is a clear trend that assaults are declining. While it is acknowledged that there is still work to do this statistic is encouraging.

Areas of concern

As highlighted in previous reports, security, drugs and mobile phones are all interrelated and remain a constant challenge. Additionally the escalating problem of New Psychoactive Substances known as “legal highs” finding their way into the prison is one of the Board’s major areas of concern this year

7. THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	2013	2014	2015
Recommended Complement of Board Members	16	16	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10	12	12
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12	12	11
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	3	3	1
Number of members leaving within reporting period	1	3	2(*)
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	594	603	658
Total number of segregation reviews held	146	156	156
Total number of segregation reviews attended	137	144	150
Date of Annual Team Performance Review / planned	10.10.13	23.10.14	12.11.15

(*) Two members stood down due to the 15 year rule
 NB: The Board is progressing 3 potential new members

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
A	Accommodation	9	7	4
B	Adjudications	2	9	6
C	Equality & Diversity	1	1	5
D	Education/employment/training	13	26	31
E	Family/visits	18	15	28
F	Food/kitchen related	7	5	6
G	Health related	67	57	63
H1	Property (Current establishment)	14	10	29
H2	Property (Transfers / in other establishment)	19	24	27
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping & Argos)	6	3	7
I	Sentence related	37	30	20
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	9	13	21
K	Transfers	17	4	7
L	Miscellaneous	34	30	49
Total number of applications		253	234	303
Average per month		21	20	25
Percentage change on previous year (%)		-59	-8	29
Confidential access to Chair		9	13	11
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		594	939	1261

The range of applications received generally follows previous year's trends. It will be noted that this year there has been an increase in the number of applications received. However, over the last 3 months there was a downward trend and the Board are satisfied they have the situation under control and have no concerns to highlight.

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)

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

This year has been a year of change at Altcourse. January saw the arrival of a new Director and subsequently there have been several changes in key senior management personnel, some new faces to the prison, others internal appointments. This restructure of senior management posts has given rise to a strong leadership team which has demonstrated a robust and determined approach to tackling the persistent problems of violence and drugs within the establishment.

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' and 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.

There have been changes too within the Board. In January two very experienced members stood down under the fifteen year tenure rules. One of those members was the Chair, Eileen Darbyshire, who made a valued contribution to the work of the Board over many years. Consequently this is my first report as Chair. That said I believe that it has been very much "business as usual". This is due in no small part to the loyalty and support I have received from the experienced and dedicated IMB team. We have worked hard to achieve a cohesive and inclusive team and this report is very much a collaborative piece of work, with members contributing in accordance with their areas of specific responsibility.

One of our priorities this year has been to diversify our visiting pattern to monitor prison life in the evening and weekends. It has been valuable to observe the late arrival of prisoners from court, the serving of evening meals and preparation for lockdown.

The recruitment of new members is key to keeping the Board refreshed and I look forward to welcoming several new members in the near future. I am pleased to note that the prison too has recruited new staff with the arrival of forty five new Prison Officers.

Undoubtedly serious issues and challenges remain but as we enter a new reporting period I can see positive movement in achieving the common goal of making Altcourse a safe custodial environment for both prisoners and staff.

Maureen Lewis
Chair

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
NPS	New Psychoactive Substance
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
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>)