



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

HMP AND YOI LOW NEWTON

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD 1 MARCH 2015 – 28 FEBRUARY 2016

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CHAIRMAN,
On behalf of HMP and YOI Low Newton Independent Monitoring Board

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STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

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

The Board is specifically charged to :

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

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

DESCRIPTION OF PRISON

Low Newton opened in 1965 as a Remand Centre with four Wings holding young men up to 21 years of age, and a discreet Wing for women of all ages on remand and sentenced.

The Prison was re-roled as a women's Prison in 1998, when it was refurbished, and now consists of 8 residential wings, together with general prisoner use areas, e.g. Healthcare Centre.

CNA (cells in use at end of reporting period)	-	280
Operational Capacity	-	344

The prison concluded a long period of upgrades to the fire control systems within the estate during the year, at various times accommodation had been unavailable as the work continued but it has now been returned to full availability.

Most cells are single-occupancy, with a small number of double-occupancy cells to cater for "at risk" women, i.e. women assessed as unsuitable for single cell accommodation.

Low Newton holds women of all ages from 18 years, on remand and sentenced; short sentences to life sentences, and also restricted status (high security) women.

Adult prisoners and young offenders are integrated. The mix is no more than 30% of YO's on each Wing, and all relevant risk assessments are carried out before it is decided on which Wing a YO should be located.

Facilities include :-

Learning and Skills Centre : - Providing a mix of full-time and part-time education courses and employment and training programmes. The Centre is also responsible for –

The Learning Shop - Is now an amenities centre and runs under the slogan “Set for success”, encourages “drop-in” computer-driven learning, run by Novus, and used by women in their own time, including evenings and weekends, for computer-based learning, e.g. languages. The facility is also used during weekdays by women on education courses, employment and training programmes, or direct learning courses; and sometimes vulnerable women who feel more secure there than in large groups in the Learning and Skills department. The Learning Shop is a very popular educational facility.

Pitstop – is now a social enterprise shop, involving sewing, knitting and making curtains, initial educational needs and training assessments for all women, also vocational and creative industries courses.

Greetings card are manufactured to a very high standard and are available for purchase by prisoners and staff. This year new machinery has been introduced. Following a selection process a small number of prisoners have been trained in the use of the equipment.

The contract for the Learning and Skills service is with Novus

Library - service provided by Durham County Council.

Healthcare Service - The Healthcare provision was put out for tender during the year. A key feature was that the provision would be delivered via separate contracts to support the various aspects of Healthcare. The contract for Health care was secured by Care UK

G4S for nursing staff.

Spectrum for Doctors

Mental Health Tees, Esk & Weir Valley Trust.

Chaplaincy - Diocese of Durham, and Diocese of Newcastle and Hexham. The prison also has a female muslim minister who visits regularly. The Chaplaincy takes care of the pastoral and emotional needs of prisoners.

Gymnasium – Programmes are available to obtain key work skills. Part of Learning and Skills. The facilities are also available to staff when off duty and a number attend to ensure that they meet fitness standards.

Visits Room - modern, spacious and pleasant. Mother/child visits take place every Friday.

Visitors' Centre - situated immediately outside the Prison – run by NEPACS (North East Prisoners After Care Service) staff and volunteers and has the assistance of a family support officer.

Outside Agencies and Voluntary Support Services include :

NEPACS (North-East Prisoners After Care Service) – register visitors on arrival and provide assistance and advice to visitors, and provide volunteers for visits, canteen and creche.

Citizens' Advice Bureau

Samaritans (train approved prisoners as Listeners)

MIND (engage with Healthcare day services – counselling (e.g. bereavement, sexual abuse, physical abuse)

Substance mis-use team (work with prison DIPS team on drugs intervention programmes)

NACRO

Open Gate (Community Chaplaincy – mentoring)

Youth for Christ

JobCentre Plus

Job Club

Parentline Plus (work in Visitors Centre)

After Adoption (work on the repercussions of adoption and liaison).

Bus Stonham – provide accommodation for women eligible for bail who cannot return to their own address, or women eligible for HDC but who cannot provide a suitable address.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Issues for the Minister

There are the continuing issues regarding the number of prisoners who are detained and are suffering from mental health problems. We are aware of some successful diversions prior to custody but there are still too many women coming into custody with custody being used as a place of safety and assessment. Although the Healthcare Unit refers prisoners for assessment with a view to their transfer to hospital accommodation the Board must question whether these women should have been detained in prison in the first instance and whether prison is the correct location for these women. Transfers of women into specialised mental health facilities has if anything become more difficult. The two very distressing cases recently experienced highlights this. In both cases prison staff have been asked to contain seriously ill women argueable beyond the establishments capacity.

Mental health assessments and provision of an appropriate placement in a secure hospital continues to conform to the the timeframe set by the Ministry of Justice, but the Board believes still earlier interventions are necessary, e.g. direction of prisoners from courts to establishments specialising in mental health care for reports.

It has to be remembered that mental health issues of prisoners is not the sole responsibility of the prison but the finding of a solution is a national problem and therefore has to be resolved at the highest level.

There have been two self-inflicted deaths during this period.

A prisoner died on 15-12-15 having given birth the week before her death. Like many of the women here her baby was removed by Social Services at the hospital. The ombudsman is completing his investigation into the circumstances of her death.

A prisoner died on 02-01-16 in healthcare. The prisoner had been unable to live in normal location due to mental health and behavioural problems. The ombudsman is completing his investigation into the circumstances of her death.

The previous self-inflicted death at Low Newton was in December 2013. The previous self-inflicted death before this was in 2004.

It is possible to say that these deaths had a considerable effect on staff working at Low Newton. Open ACCTS remain at about 10% of the population and the prison has dealt with many women in crisis that are self-harming and having suicidal thoughts.

Healthcare Governance:-

This establishment has experienced some difficulties in co-ordinating the various strands of healthcare delivery now that the contract has been divided into separate parts. Previously there was a co-ordinating Head of Healthcare.. Other inspectors such as the Ombudsman have picked up on this.

The transportation of women prisoners causes some concern to the Board. Women have often been delivered late in the day and when there are both men and women being transported together the men will generally be delivered first. It would seem that this is the result of local male prison refusing to take prisoners after a cut off time, whereas HMP Low Newton has no deadline. In addition on mixed passenger loads there have been instances where the female prisoners have been subjected to verbal abuse by the male prisoners on board. It is also understood that transport of prisoners and property is also a national problem with contracts etc not being controlled by the prison. The solution has to be resolved nationally with local input.

Issues for the Prison Service

Prisoners property has been a topic regularly raised by prisoners. Low Newton regularly receives drafts from other establishments and there have been a number of occasions when property has not arrived with the prisoner or items have been missing.

The Board feels that the issue of property must be dealt with more rigorously, in particular ensuring property records are kept up to date, are accurate and the sending prison fully reconciles property before the prisoner's departure. It is also recognised that each prison, prisoner and transport contractor has an important role to play in adhering to the rules currently in place. These may have to be revised.

Facilities Management:-

AMEY has taken on facilities management (works) A great deal of time and effort is now being spent on discussing contractual arrangements ie what is or not in the contract.

Other matters and general overview

The Board feels that prisoners are kept in a safe and supportive environment. During visits Board members regularly note that there is a good atmosphere within the establishment. I think the prison is very clean and has an orderly and business –like feel and the relationships between the staff and the prisoners remains good. All the members, and in particular the newer members have been enthusiastically welcomed and accepted..

It is the opinion of the Board that the establishment is well managed, officers have due regard to the welfare of the prisoners and the Governor and his senior staff are regularly to be seen in prisoner areas and are readily approachable.

Self harming continues to be a problem but there are robust processes in place to identify women at risk, to monitor, provide support and treat any injuries quickly.

The Board was pleased to see that the establishment received a good report at its last HMIP inspection and feels that it was fully warranted noting particularly that officers have good and professional working relationships with their charges and demonstrate genuine concern regarding their welfare.

Women's Estate:-

The announcement made to return Low Newton and other women's prisons to functional management and under a new DDC will create regional arrangements with finance, personnel and health and safety issues and these will have to be monitored and re-assessed on a regular basis.

Closure of Holloway will have a ripple effect throughout the Women's Estate as a whole and will have to be monitored to assess the overall effect on all possible women's prisons.

Bench Marking:-

This has taken a long time and Low Newton is right at the end of the process . On the plus side staffing levels have been secured following a long period when low staff counts resulted in existing staff being quite hard pressed.

The introduction of a standardised core day restricts, to some, extent, local development. There is of course a desire to fit in more scope for local initiatives but at the moment the new core day is closely tied to the bench marked figures.

HEALTH CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH

A significant number of the women arriving at HMP Low Newton have drug and alcohol dependency issues and drugs detoxification is addressed from admission on E Wing which is apart from the main block. During their period on this wing women receive counselling and close attention from health professionals

Prisoners requesting a first appointment visit nurse-led clinics, e.g. nurse prescribing, triage, where the nurse judges urgency and either prescribes or refers the patient to a GP or an appropriate clinic. Many of the nurses are qualified to prescribe.

Excepting emergencies, prisoners make written application for medical attention, or they may contact PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) by free phone. They may also raise any queries, e.g. check times of medical and dental appointments through PALS. A significant proportion of women received at Low Newton have mental health problems. This is a huge issue, as is self-harm. It is not unusual for women to have to be kept under constant or frequent watch for periods for their own safety.

The Healthcare staff cope admirably for long periods with the many seriously mentally ill, and often volatile, women who pass through their care.

As mentioned in previous years, the Board believes these women should not be in prison but should be sent for assessment directly by the courts to hospitals specialising in mental health care.

DANGEROUS AND SEVERE PERSONALITY DISORDERS (DSPD)

(known as The Primrose Unit)

The project (the Primrose Unit) is now part of the pathways with all female estates, it is a joint initiative between the Prison Service, the Department of Health and the Home Office. Its purpose is to deliver more effective interventions to dangerous women to reduce risk to themselves and others. The programme offers skills for life, including “life minus violence” programme, therapy to address unsolved psychological trauma, and behaviour therapy to treat personality disorders and self-harming behaviour.

There are spaces for 12 women, who live within a normal location and associate with other prisoners and attend an specified area to undertake their courses.

The programme is available to the whole of the female prison estate. To be eligible for the programme prisoners must have at least four years of their sentence remaining. Women who meet the criteria transfer to Low Newton for a 3-6 months assessment period. A woman assessed as suitable is set a programme individually tailored to meet her needs. The 12 places available are always filled, and there is a long waiting list.

SAFER CUSTODY

The Head of Security and Safety takes the chair at meetings of the Safer Prisons and Violence Reduction Committees. Prisoner Listeners and Insiders attend part of the meetings to give their reports which are then fully discussed. The group produce Action Plans which they work through and update at monthly meetings.

Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCTs) average about 26 any given time, and while on rota visits Board members check a random selection of files to ensure that they are up to date.

Listeners - Risk-assessed prisoners are recruited for work as Listeners – currently there are sufficient prisoners trained as listeners but the recruitment of suitable candidates is always sought. Listeners are involved in the induction programme for new prisoners, informing women of listener availability (24 hrs per day when sufficient listeners are in place) and also encouraging women to apply to train as listeners. Insiders and listeners attend and report to the prison's Safer Custody meetings.

Drugs

Drugs are always an issue in the establishment and in particular the misuse of prescribed medication which can sometimes involve bullying and intimidation. NPS has not really come into the prison and has not been anywhere near the levels experienced in male estates. However a third of the population remains on methadone treatment or reduction. Some prisoners still attempt to have subutex smuggled into the prison and one local development has been some evidence of the misuse of Buscopan (an over the counter drug for IBS). Drug test statistics are provided to the Board on a monthly basis and the board is pleased to see that any possible infractions are dealt with robustly by staff.

Anti-Bullying programme: –

There are 3 stages – Stage 1 Monitoring; Stage 2 (hard evidence available and woman placed on basic regime for 14 days minimum); Stage 3 Exit stage.

Support for victims of bullying -

A Victim Support Plan is opened which ensures that the personal officer is aware, location reviewed, whether ACCT required, cell share risk assessment if appropriate, whether psychology referral required, etc. The support plan is reviewed within 7 days of being opened and at all stages consideration is given to the risk of self-harm or suicide.

DIVERSITY

The prison service has a positive duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote Equality of Opportunity, good relations between people of different racial groups, religions, age groups, abilities and sexual persuasions. This is done by reviewing its policies, by education, and investigating complaints raised by prisoners and taking action against any member of staff, prisoner or visitor who uses insulting language or behaviour.

Policy is driven by monthly meetings of the Diversity and Race Equality Action Team (DREAT) attended by section heads at Low Newton and chaired by a Governor. The meeting, attended also by prisoner representatives, and IMB members, serves to review prison policies and actions which are relevant to minority groups including Foreign Nationals.

Monitoring of Black, Minority, Ethnic

In the North East, the percentage of the population, which falls into this group, is relatively low compared to other parts of the country. The percentage in the prison population at Low Newton is in the 8% range. Data on adjudications, complaints, prisoner releases, prisoner status, segregation and use of force is collected and reviewed by the meeting. Any statistically significant deviation from the proportion of prisoners from the BME category compared to the whole population is highlighted and explained where necessary.

Foreign Nationals: -

A Foreign National is defined as a person who is not a British Citizen and includes people from other countries in the European Union, migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees and immigration detainees. This group is, and has been a low proportion of the population at Low Newton.

There are specific needs for these prisoners including:

- Language barriers needing more opportunities to develop English skills.*
- Cultural barriers*
- Food e.g. Afro-Caribbean, Halal*
- Maintaining family links*
- Legal advice on immigration procedures*

Local policies are in place to meet the needs of Foreign Nationals when at Low Newton and, on occasions, have complimented staff and fellow prisoners on the efforts made on their behalf, e.g. the use of telephone translation service.

Other issues

In addition to their confidential healthcare assessment, all prisoners are invited on arrival to make staff aware of any specific needs they have (e.g. hearing, sight, mobility) so that any specific measures are put in place. The prison is turning its attention to wider issues of diversity by, for example, introducing prisoner buddies for the disabled and the needs of those in the 50 plus age range.

CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT AND DISCIPLINE

Care and Separation Unit

There are three cells in the CSU, an Adjudications Room, and an interview room. Staff in the Unit are very good at building up a rapport with prisoners and encouraging them to improve their behaviour. Comparatively few women are placed on Good Order or Discipline, rarely for more than 14 days, and more often up to 7 days. Occasionally, a woman known to have, or suspected of possessing drugs (e.g. on return from court) may be there longer.

A Board member is informed of any move to the Unit and, if possible, visits the prisoner before observing the 72hr GOOD review. Review panels are conducted by a governor, attended by the appropriate members of staff, with all the necessary information to

hand. The prisoner attends and is encouraged to make their representations. Reviews subsequent to the 72 hrs review are aligned to take place on Wednesday afternoons when a Board member can be available to observe, i.e. the Board member who will have taken part in the prisoner' induction programme earlier in the afternoon.

Discipline

During the reporting year adjudications averaged 53, no particular trends have been identified by the Board.

Prisoners awarded cellular confinement at adjudication are listed on a board in the CSU, but are usually located on landing cells – where possible on the landing and in the cell where they normally live. Visiting IMB members check the board and then visit anyone on cellular confinement

Board members occasionally observe adjudications while making rota visits.

LEARNING AND SKILLS

Prisoners at Low Newton are given the opportunity to address deficiencies in their educational skills to afford them greater opportunities upon discharge.

The Learning and Skills provision has been delivered by Novus since 2011; they employ a number of full time staff supplemented by tutors who are employed on a per session basis.

Upon arrival women undertake an initial period of assessment and appraisal to establish which programmes would best suit them. Women with poor literacy and numeric skills are offered plans to improve these skills and research has shown that improvement in these basic skills reduces the likelihood of reoffending upon discharge.

Novus delivers mostly vocational based courses designed to improve employability upon discharge. Courses include hairdressing, call centre duties, and beauty. The courses on offer are regularly reviewed and it is intended to introduce vocational cooking, creative industries and business in the future.

Suitable prisoners can be given the opportunity to complete the British Industrial Cleaning Sciences course (BICS) and are found around the prison using their skills to clean the establishment.

The prison gardens provide horticultural training for women. Some of the produce is used in the prison kitchen and plants are used to maintain Low Newton and other prisons estates to a very high standard.

Formal educational qualifications such as GCSE and Degree courses are supported by "Women in Prison" rather than by Novus

The College takes advantage of prisoners who have particular skills, using them to support the learners by providing one to one support and relating experiences.

The Employer Engagement Unit actively supports women in securing opportunities by building relationships with businesses and preparing women for employment by ensuring they have the appropriate qualifications, such as food hygiene certificates, and preparing them for interview and work situations.

All the staff spoken to by Board members have been very enthusiastic about the work that they do and employ success stories from previous prisoners to inspire the current class members.

REGIME (Other areas)

Reception

The Board has observed new prisoners being processed on arrival and has found that officers are courteous and compassionate, particularly with first time prisoners, adopting a firmer approach as necessary.

All prisoners are reviewed by Healthcare and issues and medicinal requirements are addressed.

Prisoners are transported by GEO Amey and the Board has received a number of complaints regarding the late arrival of prisoners to the establishment.

Resettlement

This is a core function of the Prison Service. It is directly related to the Prison Service's objective "To reduce crime by providing constructive regimes which address offending behaviour, improve educational and work skills and promote law-abiding behaviour in custody and after release". It has come into sharp focus with the new Government's policy to reduce the numbers of prisoners nationally.

Low Newton is actively engaged with civic, corporate and faith alliances to provide support when they are released.

It is encouraging to hear of links with industries that are willing to employ prisoners during and after their sentences and to hear of inspirational speakers who are willing to share their experience of overcoming obstacles in their lives to succeed in their chosen careers.

Catering/Kitchen

Prisoners are able to make their meal choices from weekly menus that are issued to them and although the catering budget is low, prisoners are offered meals which are nutritious, well-cooked and presented, and of good variety. Meals are planned and prepared and options are available to meet cultural, religious requirements and medical dietary requirements in accordance with food and hygiene regulations. Healthy eating options are also available.

Board members are invited to taste the meals on their visits and these have always been found to be excellent. There is also a comments book available for prisoners to note their opinions about the meals that they are receiving.

Regular surveys take place to obtain the prisoners opinions. The suggestions are adopted where possible. Regular theme nights are also a feature and these have always proved to be popular. Prisoners also have the opportunity of raising issues at the monthly Prisoners' Council meetings.

NVQ courses are undertaken by prisoners working in the kitchen, with a good success rate.

Prisoners' telephone facilities

There is a telephone on every landing. Calls can be made between 7.30 and 8.00 a.m., 11.30a.m.-1.30 p.m., and from 4.30-7.00 p.m. Time is not restricted unless there is a queue for the telephone, in which case staff ensure that prisoners share the time available.

THE WORK OF THE IMB

The Board at HMP and YOI Low Newton is deemed to be up to strength, with 9 members against a possible complement of 10. The board has 4 new members making good progress and are awaiting attendance at the new members course.

Board duties are arranged into two weekly rotas. In the first a member will visit the establishment and deal with any outstanding applications and also receive applications directly from prisoners (on the hoof) during the visit. Prisoners in Healthcare, Care and Separation Unit and on Cellular confinement will be visited along with a visit to the kitchen. If there are GOOD (Good Order or Discipline) reviews or Adjudications taking place during the time of the visit the member may observe proceedings.

The second rota is specifically for Wednesday afternoons when a member attends GOOD reviews. The prison aligns GOOD reviews after the initial 72 hours to take place on Wednesday afternoons so that the member can observe. The member telephones to confirm reviews are planned in order to prevent attendance unnecessarily.

The board, in agreement with the prison, has accepted the use of the PID System. Prisoner Information Desk, to induct new prisoner into the role of the IMB. The system is run by the prisoners for the prisoner and acts on the similar line as the CAB. The prisoner's have been vetted and instructed fully in their role. They have also been fully briefed by the board and given aide memoires on the boards functions. The system is overviewed by 2 board members and although it is early days applications to see the board are on the decline. The workers are able to advise their colleagues to approach the correct department for help and advice ie health care, prison complaints or solicitors etc.

The Board offers an open invitation to the Governor or his deputy to attend their monthly meeting where the Governor delivers a report and answers queries raised by Board members.

The Board regularly invites members of the prison staff to training sessions prior to the main Board meeting to give training and discuss their area of work. The Board has found this particularly effective as a way to keeping up to date with procedures and changes.

IMB Statistics

	2014/15	2015/16
Recommended Board Complement	10	10
Number of members at beginning of reporting period	8	5
Number of members at end of reporting period	5	9
Number of new members within the reporting period	0	4
Number of members leaving during the reporting period	2	1
Total number of Board meetings	11	11
Average number of attendances at Board meetings	5.7	6.2
Number of attendances at meetings other than Board meetings	18	20
Number of visits to the Prison (including Board meetings)	185	203
Number of applications (Requests/Complaints) received	179	95
Annual Team Performance review		17/02/16

Breakdown of applications: -

SUBJECT	2014/2015	2015/2016	
Bullying	12	7	
Clothing	3	3	
Employment	7	5	
Food	8	-	
Healthcare	27	23	
Left the establishment	4	1	
Offender management	10	1	
Prisoners monies	6	6	
Property	5	4	
Resettlement	5	5	
Security	27	1	
Transfers	10	9	
Visits	7	6	
Withdrawn/No further action	17	7	
Miscellaneous (not captured above)	21	17	
	169	95	

Glossary of Prison–related Abbreviations

ACCT	Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork
BEM	British Ethnic Minority
CARATS	Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice, Throughcare Services
Cc	Cellular confinement
CSU	Care and Separation Unit
DREAT	Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorders Diversity and Race Equality Action Team
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETS	Enhanced Thinking Skills
IDTS	Integrated Drug Treatment System
ISPP	Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection
FOR	Focus on Resettlement
FN	Foreign National
GOOD	Good Order or Discipline
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NACRO	National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders
PASRO	Prisoners Addressing Substance Related Offending
PCT	Primary Care Trust
RRO	Race Relations Officer
REAT	Racial Equality Action Team