



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

At

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

For the period

JULY 2015 – JUNE 2016

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.

HMP ALTCOURSE - IMB SPECIFIC OPERATING ROLE

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

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

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3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

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

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

HMP Altcourse opened for prisoners in December 1997. It is a Category B Local and Remand prison serving the courts of Cheshire, North Wales and Merseyside. Currently contracted for the provision of 1033 places, it is the designated prison for all the courts in North Wales from where approximately 30% of prisoners originate. 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

Staffing shortages across all areas of the prison have been a cause of particular concern during this reporting year. The impact of reduced numbers of prison officers has been all too apparent to Board members, particularly when they have visited residential units. Whilst it is accepted that a unit is only unlocked with a minimum of two officers on duty, it has been disappointing, on occasions, to find only one officer on the console, often unfamiliar with the unit, under pressure to respond to the competing demands of challenging prisoners and with no manager to refer to. The consequences of fewer staff have been felt throughout the prison, particularly:

- In the Offender Management Unit
- In the provision of education, the pursuit of vocational qualifications and access to the library
- In escorting vulnerable prisoners to and from medical appointments

The Board are aware that several cohorts of new officers are in the process of being recruited and trained and are confident that this will alleviate some of the pressures throughout the prison.

4.2 PREVIOUS YEAR'S CONCERNS

The Board are pleased to note that the number of prisoners detained within the Care & Separation Unit (CSU) with serious mental health issues appears to have reduced this year, as have the numbers of prisoners held there for significant periods of time. It has been apparent that the focus of Senior Managers chairing review boards has been to move prisoners out of CSU either back to normal location or out of the establishment.

The Board remain concerned over missing property when prisoners transfer in from other prisons. This continues to cause an inordinate amount of distress and frustration.

4.3 ISSUES FOR THE DIRECTOR/G4S

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

Increasing pressure for space on the dedicated vulnerable prisoners units 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.

Delivery of IMB Induction to new prisoners has proved very difficult and sometimes impossible this year, particularly to prisoners housed on the VP units. This concern has been highlighted virtually every week in rota reports and regularly discussed at monthly board meetings. However, despite repeated assurances by the Senior Management Team and concerted attempts by various managers to rectify the situation, the problem remains. When members arrive on Induction units at pre-arranged times to deliver sessions, staff are often unaware of which prisoners require induction and rooms are unavailable. The problem is exacerbated for VP prisoners who are housed across several units and staff are unable to clarify who requires induction and where they are located. It is unsatisfactory that VP carers who are particularly conscientious are left to try and resolve the unsolvable.

Although some of the Board's concerns about food quality and quantity have been addressed this year, serious concerns remain. The Board's thematic review (see 6.2) elaborates further.

4.4 OTHER ISSUES OF EXCELLENCE NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

- The Birds of Prey and the Bee Hives are a continuing success story, both for the prisoners who learn about their care and management and as a therapeutic intervention in the care and treatment of vulnerable prisoners and those with mental health problems.
- Radio Altcourse offers a variety of opportunities for prisoners to communicate both across the prison and with their families. Prisoners can request songs for fellow prisoners and record CDs to send out to family members. Visitors are invited to record a “Castaways” show and talk about specific topics. The manager of a local food bank has been invited to talk about the work and how prisoners can help.
- The Board are pleased to note that there are more opportunities for vulnerable prisoners to find work and to pursue vocational courses. Visual evidence of the hard work and enthusiasm of those studying horticulture is apparent from the attractive flower beds and topiary around the prison.
- The Board are gratified to note the excellent work being carried out within the prison to support young offenders. In particular the establishment of the Young Adult Support Scheme (YAST) and more recently, the Basic Intervention Group at Altcourse (BIGAA) which allocate mentors to prisoners aged 18-25 to provide guidance and support from the time they arrive at Altcourse. In May of this year the gym team joined with YAST to launch an “Around the World Cycle Challenge” to raise money for local children’s charities.
- 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. Family Days continue to prove popular and are well attended.

4.5 OVERALL JUDGEMENT

The overall judgement of the Board is that HMP Altcourse is operating satisfactorily despite the difficult circumstances, with managers and staff continuing to work at full capacity. That said there will always be challenges and room for improvement. It is hoped that the current pressures caused by staffing shortages will be addressed by the ongoing recruitment initiatives.

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 whilst always vigilant, feel safe and comfortable to do so. A Local Prison housing adults and young offenders (remand and sentenced) is one of the most challenging and volatile of environments. The scourge of new psychoactive substances (NPS) within the prison remains a serious concern for the Board but it is pleasing to note the commitment of the Senior Management Team to raising awareness of the dangers of these drugs. The numbers of mobile phones which find their way into the establishment exacerbate the situation and 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 regularly attend CSU Review Boards. The documentation has recently been redesigned to reflect the need to keep sharp focus on prisoners held in the CSU for extended periods and this is proving to be a valuable aid to effective monitoring.
- The Board are satisfied that the outcomes of the Review Boards and Internal and External Adjudications reflect a firm but fair approach to the prisoners who are given every opportunity to put forward their points of view.
- Due to some prisoner safety concerns it was unfortunately necessary to remove the exercise equipment in one of the CSU exercise yards. This had only been fitted the previous year but a number of incidents necessitated its removal.
- CSU prisoners continue to benefit from access to education via daily visits from the education staff. The take up rate is good with around 60% of the prisoners engaged.
- The physical condition of the unit is basic but clean. However the showers are in need of some refurbishment. This work is scheduled for attention but it is disappointing that no date has been set for commencement.
- The Board have continued to be impressed with the professionalism of the CSU staff. During this reporting year the unit has housed some very volatile and demanding prisoners. There have been instances of prisoner unrest and prisoners resorting to “dirty protests” but staff have continued to treat prisoners with respect, courtesy and dignity.
- The CSU capacity remains at twenty two and is usually around three-quarters full. However, the Board are pleased to note the efforts of senior managers chairing the Reviews to focus on strategies and exit plans to return prisoners to normal location at the earliest opportunity. This has reduced the number of prisoners held long term in the CSU and it is hoped this process will continue. Where prisoners are being held in the CSU long term it is noted that the exceptional circumstances are always documented and approved by the Director / Deputy Director or Safer Custody Management.

5.2 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

- Education within the College is now delivered by Novus. Vocational Training provision is currently under review. The College works closely with the Interventions Team. A range of shorter qualifications accredited by Apt Ed has been introduced this year reflecting the needs of the changing population in a resettlement prison.
- Prisoners must now achieve Entry 3 Maths and English in order to be eligible for a job of any description at Altcourse. The prison aims to increase this to Level 1.
- An Information, Advice and Guidance officer has taken up post during this reporting year.
- Education is offered on week days in CSU. Exams can be facilitated on this unit. There is delivery on request to patients who are resident in Healthcare.
- The Board are pleased to report the introduction of evening education. Prisoners can work towards a Creative Industries award in Radio Production. The Fit as a Fiddle independent living programme also takes place in the evening and is open to all prisoners.
- Accredited courses in English, Maths and Art are delivered on the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit. There have been many entries for the Koestler awards. This year marks the first vocational training opportunities for VPs. The academic requirement of the City and Guilds Horticulture course is taught on the unit.
- All prisoners have access to the library although attendance has dropped. Discussions with Liverpool City library regarding access to their e-library did not progress.

Areas of concern

- Whilst high rates of purposeful activity were noted in the first six months of the reporting year recent attendance at the College has been low. Daily figures show that there are days when less than half of those expected attend. Low staffing levels result in the prison having

no means of escorting prisoners from one part of the prison to another. A reluctance to engage by some prisoners has also been apparent.

- There has been under delivery of teaching hours in the College and the Vocational Training Unit. Board members have noted empty rooms when activity has been scheduled but not taken place due to staffing issues.
- The Textile and Motor Vehicle workshops are closed.
- A suitable designated area has yet to be finalised for the practical element of the Horticulture course so that it can meet the criteria for City and Guilds accreditation.
- Over a period of time this year the prison was unable to obtain exam papers for some of the accredited courses. Coursework in English, Maths and Health and Safety was neither externally moderated nor accredited. We have been told this was due to a technical problem at G4S finance centre which has now been addressed and assurances have been received that the prison will forward outstanding certificates to any prisoners who are no longer at this establishment. The impact of this has been reflected in the achievement figures for the year.
- Resources at the College are outdated and inadequate. PowerPoint equipment is in need of repair.

5.3 EQUALITY & INCLUSION

The Equality and Inclusion Team (EIAT) meets bi monthly and is invariably chaired by the Deputy Director and attended by staff across the prison representing management, healthcare, education and the equality unit. The numbers of prisoner representatives have increased over the last year and these now include representatives for young adults, vulnerable prisoners, (normally older) foreign nationals, social care and veterans. It is pleasing to note that a social care rep sees all prisoners arriving at Altcourse on the first day of custody to assess any disability and/or social care needs.

All G4S staff receive initial training in diversity and annual refresher training. A system is in place to report any cases of discrimination via DIRFs (Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms) and 24 such complaints were received in the reporting year, a reduction on the previous year.

Race and Nationality

The prison remains a largely white British establishment with over 90% of prisoners describing themselves this way (reflecting the profile of the catchment area). A snapshot on one day showed 53 Foreign National prisoners from 22 different countries but numbers are too small to identify any particular needs for these prisoners.

Faith and Belief

The largest single religious group remains Roman Catholic. The Muslim community remains low at under 30; there has been a lengthy process to appoint a permanent Imam and it is concerning that this has still not been resolved after many months. The Chaplaincy continues to provide support for all faith groups to practise their religions. However, it is disappointing to see that there has been a reduction in the restorative programmes available.

Disability

Around 200 prisoners claim to have a disability and work is ongoing to establish how many of this number have special needs. A number of prisoners have completed a health and safety course and a one day wheelchair course to enable them to assist others in their movement around the prison. The difficulties in adapting cells for wheelchair access, highlighted in previous reports, remain unchanged. The highest number of declared disabilities relates to mental health and learning needs and care is given to ensure the needs of these groups are met.

Age

Over 35% of prisoners are under 25 and this presents its own challenges which are addressed under Safer Custody. Fewer than 10% of the population are categorised as 'elderly' with the majority being in the 50-59 age range. Around 30 prisoners are over 60 and a further 15 over 70; the majority of these prisoners are housed on VP units. An Older Prisoner group which meets weekly on the VP unit affords an opportunity to associate away from younger prisoners and has proved to be a popular initiative.

Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

Numbers identifying as gay or bisexual remain very low; currently 5 and 8. However this is an increase on the previous year and the interviewing process in admissions has been changed to encourage greater openness. A focus group has been held in the prison with LGBT prisoner representatives and the prison makes clear homophobic behaviour is not acceptable.

Veterans

It is pleasing to note that there is now a veteran representative on the EIAT team. Declared numbers are small but support measures for this group are in place, particularly in respect of support services that are available on release.

5.4 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

A member of the Board takes the lead for healthcare and now meets regularly with the Clinical Manager. This has proved very beneficial and provides an opportunity to raise concerns.

- In February of this year, a new GP practice, with wide experience of working within the prison estate, undertook responsibility for delivering primary care to the prison. This has obviated the need to rely on locum doctors and has resulted in a more consistent approach to the prescribing of medication. Additionally, dedicated slots for specific clinics, regular medication reviews and an appointments co-ordinator, have reduced the waiting list to see a GP.
- Changes are planned to make the complaints form more “user friendly”
- The recruitment and retention of nursing staff is a continuous process and the clinical manager is monitoring the number of emergency code responses (263 in February of this year) which take nursing staff away from clinical duties. It is hoped that this information will be used to argue for an increase in nursing staff. The clinical manager is also insistent that all bank staff must work at least one shift a month ensuring that the prison only use staff that are familiar with the prison and its procedures.
- E-prescribing has recently been introduced into the prison and it is anticipated that this will enhance efficiency and reduce prescribing errors.
- In November 2015 the prison employed a health and social care coordinator (Social Care Act). Prisoners requiring an assessment are identified and a prisoner has been employed as a social care mentor to assist in this. Good links have been established with Lancashire Social Services who undertake assessments, support the development and review of care plans and ensure a smooth transition of care when prisoners are released. The Board are pleased to note that this has afforded a small number of carefully vetted prisoners the opportunity to act as Prisoner Independent Living Assistants (PILAs) and offer a range of support services.
- Following an incident of violence on the unit, VP and non VP prisoners are now segregated from each other and spend longer periods behind their doors. It is regrettable that this has limited patients’ opportunities to associate but ensuring the personal safety of prisoners and staff has been a priority.

Mental Health

- For reasons of safety, the new Primary Care Service has taken a much firmer line in the prescribing of medication for mental health conditions insisting that this should be the remit of the visiting psychiatrist.
- As a consequence, it has been recognised that one session a week from the psychiatrist is insufficient for the needs of the prison. This has put some pressure on the In Reach team who must deal with prisoners who appear mentally unwell and in receipt of medication in the community, unable to access treatment until they have been assessed by the visiting psychiatrist. It is a matter of some concern that previous psychiatric sessions have been

offered on a 'grace and favour' basis and do not form part of the service level agreement. These issues are to be raised with commissioners with a degree of urgency.

Areas of concern

The prison is currently experiencing staffing shortages. Although new prison officers are in training it will be some time before the prison reaches its full complement. As a consequence staff are often on duty on units where they have no prior knowledge of the specific health issues or vulnerabilities of individual prisoners.

In addition GD (general duties) staff who escort vulnerable prisoners to medical appointments are frequently diverted to cover residential units. The Board are aware of instances where prisoners have missed appointments, both in healthcare and outside hospital appointments. On other occasions prisoners have been obliged to wait for up to several hours, without access to refreshments or toilet facilities, before being escorted back to their units. This is unacceptable and has been drawn to the attention of the Director and senior managers on a number of occasions. The Board will continue to monitor this situation closely.

5.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT (Incorporating Resettlement)

- The 'new' system of Community Rehabilitation Contracts is now a year old and work between different sections, both internally and externally, is progressing well.
- The target remains that all prisoners are interviewed within 72 hours for a Basic Custody Screening (BCS) and thereafter the Community Rehabilitation Contract personnel have five days to start the re-settlement plan.
- The Board are pleased to note that most prisoners are seen within the first 48 hours of entering the establishment.
- In this reporting year the target for completing BCS was 90%. Out of a total of 3445 prisoners, 3184 screenings were completed on time, resulting in a completion rate of 92.4%.
- The number of sentence plans completed on time was 568 out of a possible 604, giving a 94% completion rate against a target of 100%.
- Offender Management Unit staff work closely with Education providers and other Induction staff to negotiate time for seeing prisoners, accommodating the needs of prisoners who are unwell and must be declared fit before the interview takes place.
- It is interesting to note that Licence Recall numbers have risen this year.

Area of concern:

OMU staff report that staffing shortages have begun to impact upon targets as dedicated OMU personnel are frequently diverted to cover other duties on residential units. Despite this, morale remains positive and the team work well together. The Board will continue to monitor this situation closely and hope that the influx of new staff currently in training will alleviate concerns.

5.6. PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

- During this reporting year changes have been made to allow all prisoners equal access to purposeful activity. Since April 2016 convicted prisoners, those on remand and young offenders have been required to undertake 31 hours of purposeful activity per week.
- The prison has sufficient full and part time activity places to accommodate all prisoners who are able to engage.
- There is a good variety of educational and vocational training opportunities within the prison. New initiatives this year include Veterans in Practice which is a digital art project aimed at ex-servicemen.
- This year has seen increased purposeful activity opportunities for vulnerable prisoners following the relocation of the VP unit. Figures show that the number of VPs in employment in June 2016 was almost double the figure for December 2015 and Vocational Training

courses are available to VPs for the first time. The accredited courses offered are in Warehouse Management and Horticulture.

- Library staff have started the “Old Codgers” discussion group (named by the participants) which meets weekly on the VP unit.
- Whilst education is available on CSU there is no in cell work on the unit. However individual reintegration plans can involve prisoners leaving the unit during the day to go to work.

Areas of concern

Despite adequate activity places low staff numbers have resulted in less opportunity for purposeful activity to be facilitated. This has affected all areas. We have noted the following:

- Gym – Staffing levels have impacted on the availability of the gym. Redeployment of staff to other duties has resulted in Foinavon gym opening only periodically and some evening sessions have been cancelled in the main gym as officer escorts are not available to take prisoners to their allocated sessions. No accredited courses were delivered in the gym this year. However, prisoners were able to undertake the gym element for non-accredited programmes. When low staffing levels resulted in prisoners having a shorter day out of their cells gym sessions for some units did not taken place. Prisoners complain of having less access to an important part of their regime.
- Library – There has been a dip in attendance this year. There are fewer officers available to escort prisoners to the library.
- The College – The drop in attendance at the College reflects both staffing levels and apathy amongst prisoners, particularly young offenders. The prison is looking at ways to encourage active participation.
- Vocational Training Unit – Workshops closed or cancelled due to low staffing levels.

We are glad to report that the prison is actively recruiting and training new officers to address staff shortages.

5.7 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

The prison has a capacity of 1033 and numbers are invariably close to that limit. The age profile has been outlined elsewhere in this report. The prison consists of 7 units plus a Care and Separation Unit (CSU) and a Healthcare facility for inmates. The newest unit, Foinavon, is all single cell and provides access to a number of high quality vocational training schemes. There are designated units for VPs, Induction and Drug Recovery (detox). Furlong Red is the Detox unit and the plan remains for Furlong Green to be a longer term drug recovery unit, but progress towards this has been slower than hoped.

A number of changes have occurred over the reporting year with the aim of improving the prison environment. These include:

- The completion of a refurbishment programme in 3 units with new floors and showers. There is a plan in place for all units to be refurbished.
- In-cell phones are now in place across the estate (with the exception of CSU).
- Healthcare and one side of Bechers have become non-smoking units with 60 residents and other prisoners waiting to locate there.
- A prison wide Prisoner Engagement Council has been changed to individual monthly unit meetings which are to report on issues and concerns. From a Board perspective there is more that needs to be done to improve prisoner engagement.
- Staffing levels on the residential units are a major concern for the Board. Frequently, on visits to units members speak to officers who are deployed from other areas and do not know the prisoners or the issues in that location. Often there will be only one officer and no sign of a manager, particularly over meal times. As a consequence other areas of the prison are left with reduced staffing when officers are taken out to cover on units. This has been a most unsatisfactory situation and one which the Board has drawn to the attention of

the Director and Senior Managers. The Board have been informed that this has been recognised; new officers are in training and a staff re-profiling is underway.

- The VP units have relocated and are now self-contained with less need for VPs to move around outside. This has reduced opportunities for verbal abuse from other prisoners.
- The number of VPs the prison houses regularly exceeds places on VP units. At times this has led to difficulties in providing the full regime entitlements.

Areas of concern

- Pressure of places on the VP unit
- Staffing on units
- Engagement with prisoners – particularly in relation to catering issues

5.8 SAFER CUSTODY

Despite the impact of staffing pressures the dedicated Safer Custody team continue their efforts to ensure that HMP Altcourse is a safe prison for both prisoners and staff. Violence reduction remains a challenge but the Board is pleased to note that new initiatives and strategies developed during the reporting period are beginning to show results.

Strategies and Initiatives

- There are ten full time and four part time carers who continue to provide an excellent service to vulnerable prisoners at Altcourse. It is pleasing to note that as part of their training all full time carers have completed an NVQ in mentoring and their achievements are to be recognised in an awards ceremony.
- The care suite in Healthcare has recently been refurbished and the Board are pleased to see that efforts have been made to make it more comfortable.
- The Board have particularly welcomed the development of two initiatives to support young prisoners. The success of YAST, rolled out in 2015 to support prisoners aged between 18-20, has been followed by the creation of BIGAA during this reporting year to support 21-25 year old prisoners.

Both are peer led intervention groups which work together to provide support and mentoring to young adults who are new to custody from the time they enter the prison and for as long as it is required. The groups ethos is setting of goals which can be achieved simply by encouraging young adults to attend education, work and in general to adhere to prison rules and regime. Some informal mediation sessions have helped to diffuse conflict between individual prisoners.

The Board are pleased to acknowledge the excellent work of both teams with regard to highlighting the dangers of NPS use. YAST and BIGAA mentors hold daily NPS awareness sessions which include a DVD presentation and the sharing of personal experience.

The mentors also have a role in the supporting young adults who are on basic regime.

ACCT

- The number of ACCT books opened in the reporting year shows an increase on the previous year, reflecting a rise in the numbers of incidents of self-harm. Staffing pressures have led to difficulties in releasing staff for the three day ACCT assessors training but the Board are pleased to note that the opening of ACCT books forms part of the initial training course for new officers.
- The Birds of Prey and hives of bees are continuing to prove beneficial in complementing the therapeutic care of prisoners on ACCT books.

Deaths in Custody

There have been five deaths during this reporting period, all from natural causes.

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

6.1 DRUG STRATEGY & SECURITY

- Although substance misuse services and their programmes continue to have successes the drug of choice within Altcourse remains NPS. The Board welcomed the new legislation banning the trade of these substances but it is too early yet to see if this has had any real impact inside prison. However, anecdotally there appear to be more prisoners who say they “wouldn’t touch the stuff”.
- This has led to an increase in the use of cannabis whilst other traditional drugs seem to be on the decrease. The Board continue to be impressed by the awareness-raising campaigns within Altcourse which appear to be having a positive deterrent effect.
- The Board’s main concern is the difficulty and lack of adequate detection methods for these psychoactive substances. Within Altcourse the drug dogs have undergone additional training and are proving to be useful.
- Although the numbers of lock down or targeted searches based on intelligence have increased there appears to be an increase in the number of visitors passing drugs.
- Despite this there is little change in the number of random searches of staff and visitors and the Board would welcome the introduction of additional searches.
- The volume of parcels thrown over the wall remains fairly static but the reduction in staff numbers is impacting upon the frequency of patrols. The Board are disappointed to note that the staff resource issue has also led to the recently formed security group being re-deployed. It is hoped this situation will improve in the coming months as new staff complete their initial training. The Board will continue to closely monitor the situation.
- The roll out of in-cell phones has proved to be successful and despite initial concerns has had little impact on the organising of deliveries of illicit substances which still rely heavily upon the use of mobile phones. It is disappointing to the Board that the use of effective telephone blockers has not been given further consideration by the prison.
- Despite an increase in drug use and drug debts within the establishment, paradoxically the number of serious incidents and violence has shown a decrease. This may be due in part to the increased use of body worn cameras which appear to act as a deterrent in respect of violence against staff. The Board are pleased to note that although these cameras are expensive their positive impact is influencing plans for a wider roll out.

6.2 FOOD & CATERING

Aramark hold the catering contract, covering prisoners’ food, a staff canteen, a shop where prisoners can order their “canteen” and a catering facility in the visits hall. The contract is currently in the process of being re-tendered.

During this reporting year the Board carried out a thematic review of all aspects of prisoners food following numerous and repetitive complaints about the quality of the meals. The report was presented to the Director and Senior Management Team and the Board were encouraged by its positive reception. In summary the following concerns emerged:

- Food quality, quantity and temperature can be variable. A particular issue arising at lunchtime is that food arrives on the units before lock up and the roll count with the result it can be up to an hour before the food is served so maintaining temperature can be difficult. The Board regularly look at food provision on units and those where supervision is more evident appear to have fewer problems relating to temperatures and quantity control.
- Engagement with prisoners regarding food is variable. The platform for raising concerns is at the regular servery meetings where prisoner representatives have the opportunity to meet with kitchen and prison management. However, in practice these meetings are invariably poorly attended by prisoners with no apparent sanction for non-attendance. It is disappointing that Board members have, on many occasions, come into the prison to attend these meetings only to find that they have been cancelled or rescheduled without adequate notification. As a consequence it has proved difficult to monitor effectively.

- Food comments books which should be held on each unit are often difficult to locate.
- Maintenance of kitchen equipment has been highlighted in previous Board reports and, in spite of some improvements, problems caused by delays in equipment repairs remain as an issue of some concern.

The Board will continue to closely monitor food provision within the prison.

7. THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	2014	2015	2016
Recommended Complement of Board Members	16	16	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	12	12	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12	11	12
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	3	1	2
Number of members leaving within reporting period	3	2(*)	2(*)
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	603	658	567
Total number of segregation reviews held	156	156	142
Total number of segregation reviews attended	144	150	139
Date of Annual Team Performance Review / planned	23.10.14	12.11.15	10.11.16

(*) One member left due to relocation and one member currently on sabbatical leave

NB: The Board is progressing the transfer of a member from HMP Holme House

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
A	Accommodation	7	4	5
B	Adjudications	9	6	5
C	Equality & Diversity	1	5	5
D	Education/employment/training	26	31	13
E	Family/visits	15	28	10
F	Food/kitchen related	5	6	5
G	Health related	57	63	49
H1	Property (Current establishment)	10	29	37
H2	Property (Transfers / in other establishment)	24	27	24
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping & Argos)	3	7	8
I	Sentence related	30	20	6
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	13	21	11
K	Transfers	4	7	10
L	Miscellaneous	30	49	29
Total number of applications		234	303	217
Average per month		20	25	18
Percentage change on previous year (%)		-8	29	-28
Confidential access to Chair		13	11	9
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		939	1261	1397

The range of applications received generally follows previous year's trends with the highest numbers relating to property and health. Although the total number received is down on the previous year it is more in line with numbers received prior to this.

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

Once again this has been a year of change at Altcourse. In May the Director moved on to pastures new in Australia and his Deputy became Acting Director whilst a permanent appointment was sought. He has continued to maintain strong leadership and has always been open and approachable so far as the Board are concerned.

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.

There have been changes too within the Board. During this year one of our members resigned due to relocation and we were fortunate in the autumn of last year to be joined by two very enthusiastic new members. I am indebted to colleagues for their support, experience and commitment. 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 respond to the increasing number of prisoner complaints about food and we carried out the thematic review referred to earlier in this report. We have endeavoured to diversify our visiting pattern to monitor prison life in the evening and at weekends. In November 2015 we carried out two evening visits and in early June 2016 a Sunday visit. It proved valuable to observe the late arrival of prisoners from court, the serving of evening & weekend meals and preparation for lockdown.

In April one of the vice chairs and I were invited to "appear" as guests on the Radio Altcourse Castaways programme. This proved to be an interesting and valuable experience. We were impressed by the expertise and professionalism of the radio team, both staff and prisoners, and appreciated the opportunity to explain on air our role as IMB members within the prison.

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

Maureen Lewis
Chair
30th June 2016

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>
CRCs	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 Interest 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>)