

NOTES FROM IMB MANAGEMENT BOARD MEETINGS, April-June 2020

Between 6 April and 1 June, the Management Board (MB) met remotely every two weeks, to provide governance oversight in a rapidly changing environment. This document summarises the discussions and decisions.

6 April

- Lynne Chambers and Kevin Whiteside joined the MB
- Work on a new model constitution for boards was suspended for the time being because of the Covid crisis

Covid issues

- Regular advice was sent out by the Secretariat. It was confirmed that, following legal advice, some direct monitoring could be carried out, if individuals chose, and letters of authority were available for members to show if challenged for example when travelling. Three regional representatives (RRs), who are also trainers, were developing guidance on remote monitoring and how to get and interrogate information.
- The Secretariat are pulling information together fortnightly from Boards' weekly rota reports so that regular updates can be provided to HMPPS and ministers. There have been positive comments from boards about prison staff.
- Secretariat staff are working at home.
- Recruitment is currently frozen. Recruitment and retention working group and training courses are currently suspended
- An option for a freephone system to deal with prisoners' applications is being developed. MB **AGREED** that a single national 0800 number should be used and piloted in ten prisons from 27 April.
- Covid death in custody information is on members' website

Other issues

- Legislation for the IMB governance structure is expected
- Appeals from Boards about visits allocations are on hold; the review group has made some in principle decisions
- IMBs are the only arm's length body in the MOJ to get a budget increase, though less than we asked for. Home Office has also provided additional funding for boards in the immigration detention estate. Financial end of year figures are being prepared; there will be an agreed overspend.
- New template and guidance for annual reports from adult prisons boards is now on members' website and draft new national monitoring framework will shortly be circulated.
- New IMB complaints and conduct process is now live

20 April

Covid issues

- Letter is going from National Chair to the Prisons Minister on findings from remote monitoring
- A letter of thanks from the Secretary of State has gone to IMB prison board members
- 2020/1 budget is being re-examined as there are significant changes, eg freephone line
- Possible redeployment of secretariat staff to wider MOJ.

- Freephone line: all volunteers will receive three hours' training (hour-long webinar sessions with back-up self-study versions) plus a handbook and laminated quick reference guide. The prison pilot will start on 27 April and the IDE pilot (voicemail only) on 4 May. Support will be available, including buddy system and daily wash-up call. There was a discussion about potential trauma support for IMB members in general.
- All Covid information on members' website will be collated under one heading and updated as necessary. MB **AGREED** that amended remote monitoring guidance would be drawn up, with hints and tips rather than expectations, general guidance on remote monitoring, and questions that might be asked in different areas.
- RRs to be asked about options for information gathering: either RRs collecting and collating information from Boards or information collated at regional teleconferences by national chair or head of secretariat. (The first option was preferred)
- HMIP is making visits to a number of establishments and publishing methodology; they will liaise with relevant IMBs. Also consideration of information sharing with PPO.

Other issues

- National Chair is giving oral evidence to Justice Committee inquiry on older prisoners on 21 April
- A paper is being prepared on issues coming from new conflict of interest (COI) processes to be reviewed by the COI panel. A COI did not necessarily mean that someone could not be appointed, if it is declared and any necessary assurances obtained; however, some COIs are exclusionary.
- The Brook House inquiry formally opens on 21 April; documents have been requested from the IMB and our barrister will advise on them.

4 May

- Mike Siswick has resigned from MB

Covid issues

- Feedback on remote monitoring guidance has been positive, but regional meetings have highlighted the differences in the quality and quantity of information provided to boards.
- HMPPS reports that fatalities are lower than feared, but there are challenges in relation to cohorting. Regime restriction and cohorting are essential in keeping fatalities down; current restrictions may go on for some time and frustrations may build. MB discussed mental health concerns, particularly unrecognised mental illness.
- Further IMB findings are being passed to HMPPS
- Paper on themes from regional meetings to be sent to MB
- Business plan is being updated to reflect current situation and priorities for decision
- 0800 phone line: 249 calls in first seven days, constituting 147 applications. Voicemail has been less successful in obtaining information than live calls. Volunteers are very positive and appreciative of training and support. Fewer calls from prisons without in-cell telephony, and one persistent caller. The greatest number of calls (45) are about healthcare.
- MOJ is allowing continued use of Zoom and Board chairs will be assisted to register
- Covid hub has been created on members' website and regularly updated
- An outline plan is being prepared for remote training, for agreement at next MB meeting, in consultation with national training team, to include emergency training needs and

medium/long-term plans. The web-based training for the 0800 line had been well received. Will Baker agreed to lead on training in the MB for 2020.

- MB **AGREED** to freeze recruitment until autumn, to be reviewed in July

Other issues

- Secretariat posts are being advertised for maternity cover and policy lead
- Information Working Group (IWG) meeting to take place on 6 May to talk through business plan priorities. Dear Chair letters are being phased out; some will be archived for future reference.
- There will be a joint IWG and national monitoring framework (NMF) working group meeting on monitoring toolkits; the revised NMF is being sent out for consultation.

18 May

Covid issues

- HMPPS medium-term recovery plan is expected, with four levels gradually loosening restrictions depending on infection rates in the community and prison. Social visits, some offender management and education for under 18s are likely to be priorities.
- There is a new instruction on PAVA use: prisons no longer need to have a signed-off key worker scheme or 50% of staff trained. Individual staff who have been trained can now use PAVA but only in exceptional circumstances.
- HMPPS is providing information on new and revised guidelines and Prison Rules and the website will be regularly updated.
- There is concern that the lockdown has led to the view in some quarters that prisoners should be out of their cells less in future, and/or in smaller groups, as prisons appear safer.
- 24 additional prisons are joining the 0800 phone line in phase 2 in June: this means the service will cover a third of prisons. More will join in July. Volunteers have been very enthusiastic.

Other issues

- A paper on training strategy and priorities was presented by Will Baker, with three stages: urgent (next three months), medium term (following three months) and longer term. MB **AGREED** the three-stage approach.
 - *Urgent training* focused on Covid-related support (continuing 0800 line training; webchat for new members; tips and hints for remote monitoring; short webinars for Board leaders and mentors on remote working). The national training team and secretariat were being equipped to deliver remote training. Training for the IDE was also a priority (monitoring segregation; mental health awareness; adults and risk and responding to allegations of abuse).
 - *Medium term* priorities include independent interviewer training; developing a remote version of the new members' course.

MB **AGREED** the priorities for Phase 1.

- A training calendar, with dates and deliverables at each stage will be produced. The training work will be linked with the IWG to ensure that training and information content are consistent. A training and information lead will be recruited and there will be further consideration of the best way of linking training delivery and governance.

- A budget paper was tabled for discussion at the next meeting; MB members were invited to comment in advance.

1 June

Covid issues

- Letters had gone to the Home Office and MOJ ministers about Boards' findings during Covid. The prisons' letter noted a rise in self-harm and suicide, concern about increased use of PAVA and prisoners' concerns about progression. In-cell telephony and video visits are proceeding slowly and IMBs are reporting concerns about frustrations building and possible disorder.
- HMPPS is publishing its recovery plan, and there are concerns about the pace of moving to a fuller regime and some apparent resistance from staff. National Chair will speak to Director of High Security prisons about the impact on prisoners with long sentences.
- An initial evaluation of the 0800 line was circulated. There was a very positive response from members involved in call handling about the training and the impact on prisoners. In prisons with in-cell phones, the number of applications has increased and in some cases better information is being provided verbally than on paper. Phase 2 (22 more prisons) starts on 1 June and Phase 3 (a further 30) on 1 July. There has been much less take-up in the IDE (only three voicemails).
- The head of secretariat has contacted HMPPS about PPE for members

Other issues

- There is a training calendar for June and a training programme for July to September is being developed, with webinars and Zoom sessions, including new members' training (June-August) and IDE sessions as agreed. 0800 training will continue.
- The MB discussed the possibility of statutory change and **AGREED** that this should aim to improve outcomes for prisoners and detainees, and that the aim should be a single arm's length body in primary legislation. The proposals should be seen to enhance independence, rather than as a bureaucratic or centralising measure. [Subsequently, following receipt of the consultation paper, the MB agreed a detailed response]. Some suggested amendments to the Prison Rules were circulated for comment.
- A budget paper was discussed, and some priorities identified, including support for recruitment and retention, revision of the e-learning platform, further consideration of the 0800 line (but not as an alternative to visits), change management and team building support for boards and regional representatives, guidance on monitoring practice.
- Revised business plan to come to next MB meeting
- Consultation process on NMF to take place over the summer, with launch in September [later postponed because of MOJ consultation on statutory change].