



INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

at

HMP ALTCOURSE

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR PRESENTATION TO THE

SECRETARY OF STATE

for the period

JULY 2010 – JUNE 2011

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 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 except for the medical records.

1. Statutory Role of the IMB

2. Contents

3. Description of the Prison

4. Executive Summary

A Issues for the Minister
Issues for the Prison Service
Issues for the Director
Issues for G4S

B Issues of Concern not requiring a response. N/A this report.

C Overall judgement

5. Mandatory Areas

- 5.1 Diversity
- 5.2 Learning and Skills
- 5.3 Healthcare and mental health
- 5.4 Safer Custody
- 5.5 Segregation (CSU)

6. Other Areas on which the Board wishes to report

Catering and Kitchens
Chaplaincy
Drug strategy
Family Days
Offender management
Probation
Property
Reception Procedures
Re-categorisation
Radio and Drama Group
Visits Centre & Booking

7. The Work of the Board

Board Statistics
Applications to the Board
Board Development and Performance
National Council Matters
Chairman's Comments

8. Glossary

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

HMP Altcourse is operated under the contracted estate by G4S, now in its fourteenth year serving the courts of North Wales, Merseyside and Cheshire as a Category B core local and remand male prison taking both adults and YPs.

Operational capacity is 1204 in seven house-blocks. The prison has a Care and Separation Unit, Library, Healthcare, Chapel and Sports Hall. Education is provided by both G4S and City College Manchester with a wide range of purposeful activity.

Workshops consist of vocational training (painting, bricklaying, plastering and carpentry on the new wing) with the existing bookshop, fabrics and office assembly and engineering in the original buildings.

Catering and canteen services are provided by Aramark.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A PARTICULAR ISSUES REQUIRING A RESPONSE

Issues for the Minister

- Slow movement of adult prisoners to open conditions this year. Most movement out has been to a cat C training establishment. Altcourse has no control over the timing of transfers from Cat C to Cat D establishments. The most recent direct transfer to HMP Kirkham, our local adult open prison, was in October 2010, there have however been a couple of transfers to HMP Sudbury during this time
- The Board has always prided itself on the close monitoring of the welfare of prisoners in this establishment, possibly over and above the call of duty. It is therefore with considerable regret that because of financial constraints and a severe reduction to the budget allocated to this Board that we are having to curtail what we see as essential duties. We are trying to plan for a much-reduced coverage in the future. The Director of Altcourse has expressed his concern that we will not be able to attend as often as we have done in the past. Several members of the Board will be leaving at the end of this calendar year and it may not be possible to replace them.
- The Minister may care to read my 'Chairman's Comments' and comment on the current parlous state of support for his IMBs and their Chairmen.

Issues for NOMS

- We would wish to draw your attention to the slow movement of adult prisoners to open conditions this year. Most movement out has been to a cat C training establishment. Altcourse has no control over the timing of transfers from Cat C to Cat D establishments. The most recent direct transfer to HMP Kirkham, our local adult open prison, was in October 2010.
- Difficulties experienced by prisoners at Altcourse who are on remand or serving a sentence a long way from their home have given rise to a number of applications throughout the year. Transfer to a local establishment would allow more opportunity for visits. Attending the funeral of a close family member outside the area is problematic. Prisoners from Southern Ireland whose justice system is completely separate are particularly affected. This happens not infrequently as the prison serves the port of Holyhead in North Wales.
- The Board makes no apology for raising again the problem of illicit mobile phones within the prison of which 364 have been found by staff in the reporting year, not including the SIM cards which pose an ever growing and even harder to find threat to safer custody. We have been studiously ignored over the years whilst the deviating technology has advanced leaps and bounds the responses to our concerns remain in the stagnant era.
- The Board would wish to repeat the request for an amendment to the Prison Rules to award all CSU prisoners closed visits. We are totally empathetic to the provision of better regimes and atmosphere on CSU but there does still have to be a deterrent factor and we feel that closed visits would be that factor.

- The urgent provision of a VP establishment in the North West Area. For too long the CSU has been log-jammed with prisoners awaiting space on the VPU. Allocations from this unit are regularly promised but rarely happen. The accommodating of VP prisoners on CSU, primarily a discipline unit is not fair or acceptable.

Issues for the Director

- There has been an increase in the accommodation of prisoners on active ACCT booklets in CSU over the year. Whilst we understand the difficulties in the placing of some violent or mentally disturbed prisoners, PSO 1700 states clearly that only under 'exceptional circumstances' should prisoners on an open ACCT be accommodated on CSU. We would welcome your future guidelines on this issue.
- We would urge the Director to liaise with his fellow Directors and Governing Governors to address the problem of the non-attendance of reporting officers from outside establishments at adjudications. The apparent cavalier attitude of prison officers to charges laid in their own establishments and then transferred to other establishments is causing concern to the Board. Although the sending prison is advised of the adjudication, more often than not, before the outside adjudicator it is commonplace not receive any acknowledgement and certainly, with one exception over the past four years, no reporting officer ever attends. At the session as we go to press eleven charges were lost in this manner. This sends the wrong message to both prisoners and the CSU staff of the receiving prison, if officers charge the prisoner then they should be obligated to attend the adjudication process through to the end. The use of video links for this purpose does not seem to be being evaluated.
- The Visits booking computer system is in urgent need of an update. We understand that G4S declined the offer of the integrated P-nomys system, however the present system is inadequate and reflects badly on the staff trying to maintain the efficiency of the department
- The Board has concerns that notification of reportable incidents to the Board is at best haphazard. We would welcome a more robust procedure to ensure that we are kept informed as required.

Issues for G4S

- Many of the existing systems in Probation within the prison are deemed not productive by the department and involve too much desk work (eg preparation of reports and assessments) and not enough interaction with prisoners. It is difficult to see how this will improve without further investment in the team as new systems are introduced. We express our disappointment with G4S in this respect.
- We would like to feel that the company, G4S, were more empathetic to the SMT and the staff at Altcourse who continue to deliver a quality service to prisoners despite the uncertainties and staff changes which have taken place over the past year.

B. OTHER ISSUES NOT REQUIRING A RESPONSE

N/A

C. OVERALL JUDGEMENT

This has been a difficult year for the Board at Altcourse. We started the reporting year with the Director being seconded and the resultant upheavals that that always produces. Unfortunately we then had to bring to the Acting Director's attention the fact that prisoners were being held under restricted regimes on wings with no formal paperwork nor notifications having been carried out.

Area office carried out a thorough investigation from which penalties ensued as a result.

The diminution of population by 120 in the reporting period has caused a radical drop in morale, staff members who have always given their all and more, are struggling to understand the ethos that they, at the drop of the hat may be made redundant whilst the prison population continues to rise and older less efficient and costlier establishments continue.

MANDATORY AREAS

5.1 DIVERSITY

- The Diversity and Equality Action Team has met bi-monthly, chaired by the Deputy Director and with good attendance from all departments of the prison. Three prisoners representing the interests of foreign nationals and older and disabled prisoners attend the meetings and have access to all documents and give input. The IMB member with Diversity as an area of special responsibility attends DEAT meetings as an observer when possible. It is a matter of concern and regret that budgetary constraints now preclude attendance at every DEAT meeting so important discussion and information is missed.
- PSI 32/2011 is to be the driver for change in this years' Action Plan and the focus will shift from a reliance on a dedicated Diversity team to putting all equality issues firmly into the mainstream of management throughout the prison. More work is yet to be done on Equality Impact Assessments.
- First night officers gather data against nine criteria concerning age, disability ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. but there are IT problems which need to be addressed to make the information collected more accessible.

Race Equality

- 185 RIRFs were generated up to the end of May (222 RIRFs during the previous reporting year). On 1st June the new generic Discrimination Incident Reporting Form was introduced covering any incident of discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the basis of Age, Disability, Gender, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, and Sexual Orientation. 11 DIRFs were received in the month of June, 8 relating to Race, 1 to Disability, 1 to Religion and 1 to sexual orientation. It will be interesting to monitor the new reporting system as it beds in.
- Approximately 8% of Altcourse prisoners are identified as 'racially high risk' at any one time. They are monitored carefully and cell sharing risk assessments take account of prejudices expressed. Racial abuse is not tolerated at any level.
- 542 (294) staff, both operational and non-operational, received some form of diversity training during the reporting year. Future training will reflect the changing focus of PSI 32/2011. There are currently 11 (7) BME staff employed in the prison. There has been very limited recruitment of staff in this reporting year.
- Preparations are already under way for observance of Ramadan in early August. There are presently 30 prisoners registered as Muslim – an unusually low figure.

Disability, Age and Sexual Orientation

- There are approximately 20 (26) prisoners registered as disabled, of which 2 (4) are wheelchair dependent. This number is probably an under-estimate as many prisoners with particular needs (eg those with diabetes, non-visible disabilities, mental health issues or learning difficulties) are not registered as 'disabled'. A new questionnaire for use on admission to the prison has been devised so it is hoped that new prisoners needs will be better met in the future. It is recognised that 'disability' encompasses social, behavioural, educational and medical issues which may need to be addressed.
- 'Older prisoners' are now categorised as 'over 50' (formerly 55). There are approximately 87 in this category, located all around the prison, of whom 9 are over 70. An 'Older Prisoner' forum is held fortnightly and a prisoner representative reports back to DEAT. The Forum has requested a dedicated unit where facilities, exercise and equipment could be tailored to meet their needs. Senior Management are currently considering this request. Healthcare has identified a dedicated nurse to meet their specific healthcare needs.
- The Sexual Orientation Liaison Officer supports all prisoners (and staff) who identify themselves. This remains a sensitive issue and it is difficult to get accurate data. There has been 1 incident reported under the new DIRF system in the last month. The long awaited PSI 07/2011 on the management of prisoners with gender dysphoria has been welcomed and already put to good use.

Foreign Nationals

- We are pleased to report that the numbers of foreign nationals held at Altcourse have decreased over the year to around 60 (75) and the transfer of longer sentenced FNPs to HMP Haverigg and HMP Risley, where there are more facilities available on site, has become a regular occurrence.
- There are many nationalities amongst the FN population and at least 19 different languages to consider. The ESOL class in Education is well attended and has become a gathering place where foreign nationals can meet. The library has a stock of books and newspapers in several different languages and is able to order books on request.
- There is still too much reliance on prisoners translating for each other and the use of Language Line is largely confined to reception interviews and in Healthcare where confidentiality is an issue. G4S are currently negotiating to install Big Word which is much more user friendly. It is recognised that official translation facilities should be available for adjudications, sentence planning and re-categorisation boards. There are basic information touch-screens in five languages on every unit and in other areas of the prison which are well used.
- Two prisoners work as foreign national orderlies alongside the Diversity Manager and help to prepare prisoners for interviews with the UK Border Agency who attend on a monthly basis.
- It is gratifying to note that the number of prisoners held as detainees on an IS91 has reduced markedly and now stands at an average of 5 (13). Most of these have passport or identity issues which need resolving before they can be moved on or deported.

5.2 LEARNING AND SKILLS

- Education facilities and activities have a high profile in the prison.
- As always there is a major emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy skills to meet the level of need in this area, with a focus on functional skills.
- The 'Dad's Away' and other associated courses are well subscribed and some really excellent work is carried out, with prisoners producing illustrated books for their children with accompanying DVD's. These courses are highly prized and there has been very positive feedback from families about the benefits for the children.
- This year prisoners have achieved 4,000 externally accredited qualifications via the British Computer Society, Open College Network, City & Guilds and Ascentis. Prisoners are keen to access the ECDL and advanced ECDL, and these courses are always fully subscribed.
- In the past, it has often been difficult to recruit suitable kitchen staff, as prisoners are released, transferred or lack commitment. A very enthusiastic and creative kitchen training manager has managed to recruit prisoners who have taken up vocational courses, giving them skills to take with them to catering and hospitality careers, on release.
- The vocational workshops are now operating at capacity, following building renovations and structural issues.
- The 'Train to Change' course has had another successful year, resulting in an increased number of qualifications. This is well subscribed; a new programme will begin in September.
- Art classes are always well attended and some outstanding work is produced. The students from the art classes produce the scenery for the drama group. They have also recently decorated the crèche in the visits hall – they have done a wonderful job and should be congratulated for their efforts and creative talents.
- The gym as always is very popular and is able to provide programmes for vulnerable prisoners, health programmes and activities for older prisoners. Of course, the gym is a valued resource for almost all prisoners. Football is very popular and matches are arranged between the 'Altcourse Angels' and visiting teams.

5.3 HEALTHCARE & MENTAL HEALTH

- As mentioned in previous annual reports, the provision of healthcare in a prison environment remains a hugely challenging and complex matter. Despite this fact, it is now approaching 2 years since G4S took over direct responsibility for Healthcare. The board is pleased to report the service has continued to develop effectively over the last 12 months and is satisfied there is a high standard of delivery in healthcare provision; both clinically and through a range of health promotion activity.
- With the NHS change programme ongoing, the future role of the local Primary Care Trust within the private sector is uncertain. However, against this difficult background the partnership arrangements have remained very positive and supportive.
- The PCT – G4S Partnership Board meets on a quarterly basis with the prime aim of driving forward the overall improvement strategy. However, a range of agreed Key Performance Indicators are shared on a monthly basis to provide focus and ensure effective ongoing monitoring plus the opportunity to address any concerns so as to maintain the continued delivery of good quality healthcare services.
- New initiatives which have been introduced since our last report and which should be applauded are:
 - The opening in January of the carefully planned Healthcare 2 Unit which provides a 5 day stabilisation and assessment period for new prisoners with alcohol or drug abuse issues, before they are transferred into the mainstream of the establishment. The unit can hold up to 28 and has received positive feedback from prisoners using the service.
 - Responsibility for undertaking Learning Disability Screening. As part of the initial healthcare induction assessment, the screening mechanism routinely identifies prisoners with learning disabilities. This important information not only informs and aids understanding by prison staff but identifies any needs or specialist support which may be required by the prisoner.
 - Opportunities for prison staff to undergo routine health checks at specific staff clinics which are held once a month.
- With regards to Mental Health, it is recognised that prisoners have significantly higher rates of problems than the general public with a wide range of conditions and illnesses. This undoubtedly continues to place exceptional challenges and demands on both the in house Specialist Mental Health and In-Reach teams and the visiting Psychologist. The situation is not helped as the health specialists at courts are often not highlighting or addressing issues early and leave the ‘problem’ for the prison system to take appropriate action.
- IDTS was introduced into the prison in April 2009 and continues to be effectively controlled and managed. However, support from Methasoft has at times been rather frustrating and caused delays in development of the overall process. Again reporting to and monitoring by the PCT is carried out monthly. There are normally about 150 prisoners on the programme at any time. Nursing staff have been urged to make regular visits to the Visitors Centre to engage with prisoners whilst their family are present. The aim is to provide further support and encouragement from families.
- The IDTS team were given a positive ‘*Green traffic indicator*’ as a result of the PHPQI (Prison Health Performance and Quality Indicators) audit undertaken in May.
- At the end of the reporting year, the IMB had received 130 prisoner applications relating to Healthcare issues against 181 for 2010 representing a 28% decrease on the previous year. The board are content that the majority of the applications received were found to be of a routine nature and are fully satisfied there are no concerns to highlight in this report.

5.4 SAFER CUSTODY

Safer Custody continues to be given the highest priority at Altcourse, with the absolute emphasis on “duty of care”. A senior manager and small, highly focused, team implement the relevant PSOs and PSIs together with area and establishment initiatives. All activity is carefully monitored and recorded using the Continuous Improvement Plan, which is based

on the “traffic light system” of reporting. The Board’s overview is that this challenging area of operation is handled diligently, competently and sensitively by the establishment.

ACCT (Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork)

- Internal Audit completed in March 2011- result amber/ green 85/91%
- Documentation is sample checked on a regular basis. When shortcomings are identified they are highlighted by the Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator and further training is given.
- The requirement for good quality and relevant Care Plans is constantly restated at Safer Custody meetings and with occasional exceptions, the quality is assessed as good
- Case Reviews are well conducted and thorough, with all appropriate staff in attendance. In the case of a continuous ACCT Review, there is an enhanced Review Board (in accordance with PSO 2700). This includes the chaplaincy and an IMB observer, when possible.

Safer Custody Team

- A fully minuted monthly Safer Custody Policy Meeting is held. This is attended by representatives from relevant departments, a representative from the Samaritans, two Prisoner Carers (for part of the meeting) and an IMB observer.
- Action points are dealt with from the minutes and where possible incorporated into the Continuous Improvement Plan.

Safer Custody Strategies and Initiatives

- The establishment values the use of peer support and in this connection has a highly valued system of trained Prisoner Carers, presently totalling 21 (8 full time and 13 part time), including one Young Offender and two Vulnerable Prisoner Carers.
- On each Residential Unit there is the facility for prisoners to contact a wide range of external “help and assistance” agencies via one well publicised PIN number. The agencies include the Samaritans, NACRO, National Debt Line, Shelter, Crime Stoppers, Fag Ends, Drink and Drugs help and the Prison’s Safer Custody help line.
- A new system of prisoner “Buddies” has been implemented. These are Carers who are linked with particularly vulnerable prisoners.
- There is a Safer Custody Rep on all wings of each Residential Unit who is designated to “meet and greet” new prisoners on arrival on the wing.
- The Observation Cell has been used 84 times during this reporting year (67 in 2009/2010). This includes multiple use for a small number of highly vulnerable prisoners.
- The Care Suites, one located on Healthcare and the other on Valentines Residential Unit, have been used a total of 53 times in this reporting year (45 in 2009/2010). This includes multiple use for a small number of prisoners.
- A review of current accommodation to remove as many identifiable ligature points as possible has taken place. Costings of the necessary changes needed have been forwarded for central approval and a decision is awaited.
The First Night Centre is now located on a wing of the Induction Unit to a) cope with the numbers involved and b) enable the initial processing of those prisoners new to custody to be conducted in a separate supported environment
- A comprehensive system of identification of High Risk situations via trigger points is in place and is widely publicised throughout the establishment.
- Violence Reduction/Bullying is an on going challenge with peaks and troughs. There is a coherent Anti-bullying Strategy (ABS) which is used in conjunction with the Incentives and Earned Privilege (IEP) scheme and Adjudications. Further establishment initiatives include peer support via the Safer Custody Rep system, a poster campaign relating to verbal abuse and a poster campaign aimed at visitors who may have useful information which could help in controlling violence and bullying. A revised Violence Reduction Strategy document was brought into operation in April 2011.
- Cell Sharing Risk Assessment (CSRA) was completed in April 2011 and upgraded risk assessment procedures have been introduced.
- The establishment is committed to reducing serious assaults which are currently the highest for all similar establishments throughout the prison population.

- Mental Health Awareness Training is delivered to all relevant staff and to IMB members.

Deaths in Custody

- Despite the best efforts of the establishment, there has been one unexplained death during the reporting year (4th April 2011). It is subject to investigation by the Police and the Ombudsman, this investigation is still ongoing. The Board extends its sincere condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.
- The Board is informed of any deaths in custody and is fully involved in monitoring the investigations and any inquests.
- To date there are two inquests outstanding, one relating to the death on 4th April (see above) and the other a prisoner who died at another establishment but had spent time at HMP Altcourse.
- The Board is fully aware of excellent pastoral/operational work by Family Liaison Officers, Chaplaincy and Senior Management in cases of death, serious injury or serious illness involving a prisoner.

5.5 CARE AND SEPARATION

- Own interest prisoners are now employed as painters and orderlies on the CSU.
- For appropriate prisoners exercise periods are now taken in pairs.
- CSU prisoners, where appropriate now collect their own meals as distinct from having them delivered to their cell.
- CSU hourly checks are verified by the Proxipen system.
- With due change of use permission, the Safer Custody team are hoping to be relocated to the CSU.
- The Board would welcome a structured definition of CSU into a CSUVP unit and a CSUGOOD unit with an enhanced regime for the VP prisoners conducive to the VP unit.
- The special cells have not been used during the reporting period.
- A prisoner from another unit at Altcourse has been commissioned to produce twelve large paintings for CSU, to gain a more relaxing and calm atmosphere for prisoners.
- The Board are concerned over the accommodation on CSU of prisoners on active ACCT booklets, the caution in PSO1700 is 'only under exceptional circumstances' whilst we appreciate that violent and mentally disturbed prisoners may have to be lodged there for their safety or that of staff or other prisoners.
- The provision of education on CSU has been curtailed and we go to press with only a minimal attendance now existing.
- The Board would wish to press PMU for the provision of a VP prison in the North West Area, to remove the backlog of VP prisoners on CSU caused by the log-jam on the VP unit. Currently there are 15 prisoners awaiting VP spaces, allocations from the VP unit are promised but more often than not do not happen.
- The provision of clothes washing facilities on the unit itself would be much appreciated.
- Mental health awareness training for CSU staff, although much talked about, has not yet happened and needs attention.
- The provision of carers as orderlies on CSU would be a most positive move.
- The provision of employment in the form of the assembly of fridge magnets for CSU prisoners is welcomed.
- The proportion of prisoners held on GOOD forms 0.56% (0.43%) of the prison population, the average weekly population is 14 (11) representing 1.16% of the population. () denotes last reporting year.
- CSU review boards are held bi-weekly and the Board have attended 99% of these, there has still not been the recommended provision of a written audit trail for security investigations, nor of the progress of police investigations nor of the progress of transfers. We are very concerned that these processes do not have an audit trail and undermine the professionalism of the review board.
- The Board would wish to repeat the request of a PSI awarding all CSU prisoners on GOOD closed visits for the duration of their stay on CSU. We are totally empathetic to the provision

- The provision of exit strategies despite being raised by this Board has not been addressed, the confining officer is not part of the CSU intake and no ownership of the prisoner exists whilst they are on CSU.
- The implementation of programmes on CSU has not been a success not due to the lack of involvement of the team but because of the necessary volatility of the CSU population

Internal and External Adjudications

- The Board have continued to monitor the SMT-led adjudications and are pleased with what they have found. Great emphasis is placed on explanations to the prisoners, the provision of adjournments and attention to detail.
- The attendance or lack of by reporting officers has improved due to the diligence of CSU staff and managers.
- There are still far too many adjudications, which the staff could have managed on the wing under the IEP scheme, this problem has not improved.
- Altcourse continues to enjoy the attendance of the same Senior District Judge as they have since the inception of the scheme. This has resulted in a stability of sentencing and a responsive and quickly response to changing problems within the prison. The attendance of an IMB member to these sittings has been productive.
- Numbers of awards for mobile phone possessions, or the use of, have greatly increased (23%) over the reporting period.
- 'Disobeys a lawful order' is the rule most commonly abused (24%), followed by 'unauthorised articles' (22%) and 'administering a controlled drug' in third place.

Basic Regimes

- The concerns of the Board about the original 'Pre Entry' regime have been well documented in previous annual reports and therefore we report with pleasure on the abandonment of such and the launch of a Basic Regime. The prisoners on this regime are contained on one residential wing only.
- The Board together with the Head of Residence and Head of Safer Custody has put in a lot of work to ensure that Basic maintains a balance between decency and security. The Basic Regime document is an ongoing area and has been amended twice since inception, allowing two other problem areas, including serious assaults to be assimilated into Basic.
- Prisoners found guilty of receiving or collecting parcels within the establishment, of having committed a serious assault or having a pattern of bad behaviour are placed on basic regime for a minimum of four weeks and then returned back to normal regime at level two for a further four weeks. They are reviewed every week whilst on basic and the Board attends these reviews. Whilst not a magic bullet this regime does appear to be having a restraining effect on the persistent offender in the prison.

OTHER AREAS ON WHICH THE BOARD HAS ISSUES TO REPORT

CATERING AND KITCHENS

- The Aramark shop is well organized and servery meetings are held on a monthly basis attended by the Diversity manager, Number 1 servery, the Catering Manager and the servery representatives from all wings. Issues that are raised are noted and resolutions sought.
- All prisoners' dietary needs are now catered for. Those who are vegetarian, vegan or Muslims, are catered for by the use of colour- coded utensils which has alleviated some of the problems that were of concern.
- With Ramadan beginning on August 1st this year the lunch boxes purchased last year for those Muslims keeping the fast, has proved to be very useful as the meals can be kept hot for quite some time.
- There has been an improvement in the food, as regards quantities and varieties, although at times there are still some complaints received by the Board regarding the food.
- There are approximately 60 staff working in the kitchens (20 at any one time) including a kitchen manager, a head chef and 2 chefs.
- There are 13 workers undertaking NVQ qualifications, 11 on level 1, 2 on level 2. 10 other prisoners work alongside them efficiently and conscientiously.
- There is an external company that offers a qualification to the prisoners for the work done in the shop.

CHAPLAINCY

- This is not normally a reporting area for the annual report, however, it is important to recognise and highlight the care provided by the chaplaincy team in the daily life of the prison through a range of support and interventions.
- They continue to take the lead on the SORI programme (*Supporting offenders through Restoration*) and have recently successfully completed the 11th course which has been delivered over the last few years.
- SORI is an opportunity for prisoners to participate in a structured course and fully acknowledge the harm they have caused and importantly make amends for that harm. Victims of crime from the local community also participate to encourage and help prisoners to think and understand the effects of their behaviour on others. At the end of the course, the prisoner makes a public statement at a formal event. Whilst this is rather emotional for all concerned it is undoubtedly having a very positive effect.
- One of the most rewarding aspects of Chaplaincy work is the two Christian Discussion Groups, constantly well attended and greatly appreciated by the men who attend. A real opportunity for men to safely explore various aspects of Faith and their response to the challenge of Faith. The group is one of the rare opportunities for men in prison to safely be themselves.

DRUG STRATEGY

- The supply and use of illegal drugs remains a serious problem within the establishment. G4S continue to be proactive in trying to address this through a range of security measures, which include intelligence gathering, target searches, mandatory and voluntary drug testing. However, the key supply route is items, including mobile phones, being thrown over the prison wall and into the prisoner exercise yards where some important finds are regularly retrieved by staff.
- Strenuous efforts are made to reduce demand by providing prisoners with a range of intervention options, starting with new prisoners with serious issues being initially supported in the special 5 day stabilisation unit before being transferred to the mainstream Detox Unit.
- There are about 150 prisoners at any time on the IDTS programme (*refer also to our comments under Healthcare*) and normally 346 prisoners on CARATS programmes,

FAMILY DAYS

- Family Days are now held regularly in the Visits Hall and are much appreciated by those prisoners who have earned the right to be there and even more so by their families.
- Enhanced prisoners who apply for a Family Day Visit are subject to risk assessment and their families are invited to attend for two hours of relaxed fun and entertainment which is focused on fathers spending quality time with their children.
- These popular days are run jointly by the prison social worker and staff from education and visits and include competitions, magic, puppet shows and dancing.
- It has been a pleasure to attend these worthwhile events which bring families closer together and help them have fun and laughter – a short period of ‘normalisation’ during difficult times. This is another fine example of work being done ‘outside the box’ by staff in Altcourse.

INDUCTION

- The general perception is that the process is established and that prisoners are given a concise overview of prison regimes. There are minor problems, one of which is the availability of medical staff in the admissions department at times of intake, which can delay the process and put stress on prisoners who are already anxious.

OFFENDER MANAGEMENT

- The prison’s Offender Management Unit is predominantly operating effectively.
- There is currently a limited number of programmes in operation including:
 - Impact on Victims
 - Short Duration Programme
 - Building Skills for Recovery Programme (currently being piloted)
 - Alcohol Awareness
- It would be desirable to have more programmes made available in general and specifically to see the funding for a domestic abuse programme, as many of the individuals that OMU work with at Altcourse have this as part of their sentence plans.

PROBATION

- Despite an increasing workload, the team of full-time probation officers seconded to Altcourse from Merseyside Probation has been reduced to three. The most experienced officer was deployed elsewhere in April, is much missed, and there are no plans to replace him. Secondments are usually for a four year period which officers feel is insufficient to really get to know the job. The most experienced member of the current team has been at Altcourse for three years.
- The present team of three deal with a varied workload which includes sentence planning, Parole Board applications, risk assessments and ROTL requests. The caseload is rising and there are concerns as to how the workload will be managed when the new system of offender management of all prisoners becomes operational in April next year.
- The team also contribute to establishment meetings which involve MAPPA, ROTL, Re-categorisation and Child Protection issues, and have links with other agencies both in and out of the prison in relation to public protection.
- Many of the existing systems are not productive and involve too much desk work (eg preparation of reports and assessments) and not enough interaction with prisoners. It is difficult to see how this will improve without further investment in the team as new systems are introduced. We express our disappointment with G4S in this respect.

PROPERTY

- It has now been established that the excess property of any person serving two years or more will either be sent to H.M.P. Branston or to their family. There are still problems with property from other establishments not arriving with the prisoner. There has been an increase in the size of stereos permitted and electronic games are also permitted for prisoners' use.

RE-CATEGORISATION

- Categorisation reviews are held regularly.
- Prisoners who are under 25 are transferred immediately to Thorn Cross when re-categorised as Cat D.
- When places become available, priority is given to long term prisoners. No prisoner with less than 12 months of a sentence to serve will go to a Cat D establishment.
- Slow movement of adult prisoners to open conditions this year. Most movement out has been to a cat C training establishment. Altcourse has no control over the timing of transfers from Cat C to Cat D establishments.
- The most recent direct transfer to HMP Kirkham, our local adult open prison, was in October 2010, however transfers have occurred to HMP Sudbury.
- The diminution of IPPs to 26 at the end of the reporting year has pleased the Board after our concerns voiced in last year's report.
- A number of prisoners are pleased to have been given Cat D status but prefer to remain at Altcourse rather than move to a Cat D establishment outside the area as additional distance and extra travel expenses would impact on their visitors.

RECEPTION PROCEDURES

- Reception procedures continue to be of the highest standard. The systems remain well established and thorough. There are, however, signs of pressure on staff due to the high intake of prisoners and extra paperwork. A new system has been introduced whereby staff have to check pre convictions on IIS to highlight relevant issues thus detailing a criminal history of all new intakes. Whilst this is a valuable risk assessment, it is an extra task on a pressured department.

RADIO AND DRAMA GROUP

- The Radio and Drama Group continues to flourish at Altcourse and to expand its remit. It now includes animation, puppeteering and radio production as well as drama, music, film making and audio broadcasting and editing. Funding has just been received to embark on a creative writing course this coming autumn.
- The Group employs 5 full-time prisoner employees and Radio Altcourse 24.7 has proved to be a real success story culminating in a Koestler Silver Award for Radio Production during the year. 13 prisoners work part-time for the group in various capacities and at least 90 prisoners have been involved in some way over the year. Some achieve recognised qualifications in audio editing and movie making.
- Under the thoughtful direction of the PCO who set the group up originally, Altcourse prisoners are now helping HMP Parc and HMYOI Stoke Heath to start up their own Radio and Drama Groups.
- Two past Group members, now discharged from prison, have gone on to get work in Hospital Radio and one is facilitating creative writing courses for 'at risk' groups.
- Following the success of the Group's performances of 'Crossroads' presented to vulnerable 'at risk' groups on a regular basis, a film has been made of the play which is now part of a resource pack to be marketed to groups working with high risk young people.
- The Drama section gave six performances of their Christmas show 'Under the Arches' in December. This coming year's show is already in preparation and will be a version of 'A Christmas Carol' using a combination of media including acting, music and film. The prison band 'The Insiders' continues to flourish and support all the group's events.

The Board is pleased to report the continuing and growing success of this innovative Group. Its worth is recognised by all those who benefit from working with the Group, being entertained by it, or receiving the very positive messages it promotes.

VISITS CENTRE & BOOKING

- Remains an area of basic functionality (crying out to be a project for the art department). Again, as reported last year, visitors who arrive early and are subject to inclement weather would welcome a shelter outside.

BOARD MATTERS:

- We continually strive to maximise our resources and in line with best practice, we conducted a rigorous annual team performance review to evaluate our effectiveness. This resulted in the development of an improvement plan with a number of clear specific objectives on which to focus and was supported by a tailored learning and development plan. The board are satisfied that these objectives, including its mandatory obligations, have now been fully met for the reporting year.
- The size of the board is currently 13 members and during the period we recruited 1 new member with another member transferring to Maidstone due to work commitments. Unfortunately 2 further potential members were not able to take up their appointment. Further interviews are planned in the near future as we continually strive to strengthen the size and diversity of the board to reflect our local community.
- With regard to the wider tasks undertaken by members of the Altcourse Board:
 1. One member resigned from the National Training Team after 12 years service of delivering training programmes but remains on the 'Reference Book' working group and the Healthcare Support Group. We are also pleased to report that in the 2011 New Years honours list, they were made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for their contribution to the IMB over 20 years.
 2. The Board Development Officer continues to serve on the National Training and Development Strategy Group.
 3. Another member serves as an Independent Interviewer assisting with Board recruitment at establishments across the North West area.
- We are sorry to report that our Chair has indicated that he will be standing down from the Board when he completes his term of office at the end of this calendar year. His tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience will undoubtedly be missed, not only by the Board but the IMB in general. The Board would therefore like to take this opportunity to record its thanks and appreciation for his dedication and commitment to the role of the IMB over a 14 year period and wish him well for the future.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MATTERS:

- Whilst understanding the country's current financial situation, the board is concerned at the budget cuts which are having a profound effect on its ability to monitor in depth in a meaningful and effective manner. We have tried to be innovative to maintain our high profile presence within the establishment in order to minimise the impact. However, with the current budget restrictions we have to be realistic that it is not possible to continue to cover in a hitherto comprehensive manner the wide range of responsibilities carried out. Indeed, we feel it will be a challenge to maintain our professional and credible image. We would, therefore urge the National Council to review the IMB's Terms of Reference by undertaking a wide consultation process with boards across the custodial estate and other interested parties with the aim of achieving a refreshed and newly focused role.

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS TO BOARD:

CODE	SUBJECT	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
A	Accommodation	18	48	47	39
B	Adjudications	16	20	13	25
C	Diversity related	3	14	10	9
D	Education/employment/training	20	39	91	103
E	Family/visits	55	69	92	110
F	Food/kitchen related	25	44	28	23
G	Health related	127	141	181	130
H	Property	126	150	204	158
I	Sentence related	249	349	358	186
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee related	65	54	54	44
K	Transfers	58	44	51	69
L	Miscellaneous	200	199	209	159
Total number of applications		962	1171	1338	1055
Average per month		80	98	112	88
Percentage increase on previous year (%)		70	22	14	- 21
Confidential access to Chair		-	45	138	97
Request & Complaints to G4S (COMP1)		977	1055	1373	1141

- Investigating prisoner applications takes up a considerable amount of the board's time and impacts on its prime monitoring duties, particularly in the light of the board's budget cut. We have therefore been proactive in trying to encourage prisoners to raise the more routine queries directly with prison staff where they will normally obtain a much quicker response. This appears to have had a positive impact by producing a 21% reduction in applications received during the reporting period.
- As with previous years, it will be noted that '*Sentence related (Code I)*' matters produced the highest number of applications from prisoners, accounting for 186 or 17% of the grand total. It is disappointing that once again the majority of these queries relate to HDC issues and that there have not been any significant improvements to addressing the concerns expressed in last years report, regarding the process and understanding by prisoners.

BOARD STATISTICS	2010	2011
Recommended Complement of Board Members	20	20
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	16	14
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	4	5
Number of members leaving within reporting period	1	4
Total number of Board Meetings during reporting period	12	12
Average number of attendances at Board Meetings	10 a	10
Total number of visits to the prison (including all meetings)	764	520
Total number of applications received	1338	1055
Total number of segregation reviews held	111	106
Total number of segregation reviews attended	96	103
Basic regime review boards attended	N/A	52
Number of attendances other than Board meetings	648	400

a. Attendance figures at Board meetings are swayed by the number of members on sick leave or who have been appointed for less than twelve months or who were on sabbatical.

General Duties of the Board

Applications
Attendance with the external arbiter on a three-weekly basis
Attendance as observers at establishment committees (see list below)
Attendance at the Coroner's Court
Basis Regime review boards
CSU review boards
Observation of adjudications
Presentation of an induction programme to new prisoners four times weekly
Presentation to the initial training courses for new staff
Weekly rota visits

Meetings attended by the Board on a regular basis:

Drug Strategy
Diversity Group
Health and Safety
IMB Annual Conference
PCT Partnership Meeting
Public Protection Meeting
Quality Improvement Group
Reducing Re-offending Pathways
Resettlement
Safer Prisons
Security
Separation Management and Review Group
Violence Reduction

The Chairman or the Deputy also attend:

Contracted Prisons' Chairmans Meeting with National Council Representative for Contracted Prisons
North West Chairmans Meeting with the North West Area National Council Representative
Re-categorisation boards.
Weekly meeting with the Director

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

As previously mentioned this has not been an easy year for the Board, however duties and responsibilities have been carried out diligently and professionally. A 27.68% cut to our budget has resulted in rota duties having to be conducted by single members as distinct from the previous pairing arrangement. This is not ideal and Government need to be cogniscent that these are essentially volunteers carrying out a difficult, accountable and essential duty and that severe cuts as these will result in a dispirited Board who are giving of their time and effort for no remuneration and indeed in some cases may be out of pocket. The Ministry must decide whether it is prepared to properly fund the IMB, reorganise the whole structure or abandon, with the loss of a most meaningful watchdog.

For myself, as Chairman, I will be standing down both as Chair and as a member of the IMB at the year end. I have spent fourteen happy years with a dedicated and resolute Board many of whom I may now count as friends. To them must go my thanks for all their support in nine years of Chairmanship during which they have worked extremely hard to monitor the safety and concerns of both prisoners and staff. I thank you all for supporting me through thick and thin and attending through all weathers, I will miss you all greatly without doubt.

I hope that ways will be found to continue the ethos of IMBs, in whatever form, for as long as custodial establishments exist.

Dr John D Schofield
Chairman
Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Altcourse

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY OF PRISON-RELATED ABBREVIATIONS USED

AA Administrative Assistant	HCC Health Care Centre
ABS Anti-Bullying System	HDC Home Detention Curfew – the Tag
ACCT Assessment, Care in Custody & Teamwork – replacement for F2052SH	HDCED HDC eligibility date
ACR Automatic Conditional Release	HMCIP Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
ARD Automatic Release Date	ICA1/2 Initial Categorisation & Classification Forms for Adults/YOs
BCU Briefing and Casework Unit – PS unit handling adjudication appeals	IDTS Integrated Drug Treatment Strategy
BME Black & Minority Ethnic	IEP Incentives and Earned Privileges – Prisoners can be on Basic, Standard or Enhanced
BOSS Body Orifice Security Scanner	IG Instruction to Governors
C & R Control & Restraint	IMB Independent Monitoring Board
C2W, CTW Custody to Work – pre-release focus on housing, employment and lifestyle issues	IND Immigration & Nationality Department
CARATS Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice & Throughcare Scheme – drug & alcohol team	IRC Immigration Removal/Reception Centre
CC Cellular Confinement – a punishment	JSA Job-Seekers Allowance
CCD Criminal Casework Department (Croydon)	JSAC Job Simulation & Assessment Centre (for officers seeking promotion to SO)
CCT Criminal Casework Team (part of Home Office Immigration & Nationalities Dept)	KPI/KPT Key Performance Indicator/Target
CMU Case Management Unit – work on sentence planning & progress	LDR Latest Date of Release
CNA Certified Normal Accommodation	LED Licence Expiry Date
CRD Conditional Release Date	LGBT Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender
CSU Care and Separation Unit	LIDS Local Inmate Database System – IMB can use this to check location, dates, etc.
DASU Drug And Alcohol Support Unit	LSC Learning & Skills Council
DEAT	MAPPA Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
DH Dog Handler	MDT Mandatory Drugs Testing
ECL End of Custody Licence	MSL Minimum Staffing Level
EDR Earliest Date of Release	MQPL Measuring the Quality of Prison Life
EO Executive Officer	NACRO National Association for Care & Resettlement of Offenders
EGP Ex Gratia Payment	NC The National Council for IMB
ETE Employment/Training/Education	NOMS National Offender Management Service – amalgamation of the Prison & Probation Services
ETS Enhanced Thinking Skills Course	OASYS Offender Assessment System – computerised risk & needs assessment
F2050 Prisoner's basic record	OBP Offending Behaviour Programme
F2052A Prisoner's wing record	OCA Observation, Classification & Allocations – a Reception task
F2052SH Record for prisoner currently at risk of self-harm	OLASS Offender Learning and Skills Service (part of LSC)
FLED Facility Licence Eligibility Date (when prisoner may be considered for ROTL)	OI/OR/OP Own Interests/Request/Protection – Segregation under Rule 45/49
GOOD Good Order or Discipline – Segregation under Rule 45/49 (historically GOAD)	PASRO Prisons Addressing Substance-Related Offending – an OBP
	PCO Prison Custody Officer
	PCT Primary Care Trust – National Health component responsible for healthcare

PER Prisoner Escort Record
PIN Prisoner Information Notice
PMU Population Management Unit (central)
POPO Prolific and Persistent Offender
PPO Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
PPP Public Protection Panel
PS Prison Service
PSI Prison Service Instruction
PSO Prison Service Order – see
www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/resourcecentre/psispsos/listpsos
RFW Removal from Wing – a punishment
ROAD Remission of Added Days (up to 50%)
ROM Regional Offender Manager
ROR Restoration of Remission – now ROAD; Risk of Reconviction;
ROTL Release on Temporary Licence – e.g. to work in mess; town visits; home leave
RRA Assistant to the RRLO
RRLO Race Relations Liaison Officer
SAU Standards Audit Unit
SCG Safer Custody Group
SED Sentence Expiry Date
SEO Senior Executive Officer
SIN Staff Information Notice
SIR Security Information Report
SLA Service Level Agreement
SMARG Segregation Monitoring and Review Group
SMT Senior Management Team
SPDR Staff Performance & Development Record – reviewed annually
SOTP Sex Offender Treatment Programme
STOP Substance Treatment Offender Programme
TOIL Time Off in Lieu (of payment)
VDT Voluntary Drugs Testing
VO Visiting Order – sent out by prisoners, allows named people to visit
VTC Vocational Training Centre
Gold Commander Headquarters controller for serious incidents
Silver Commander Person in establishment in charge of serious incidents
Bronze Commander Local Sub Commander for serious incidents
Operation Tornado System to provide extra staff and resources for serious incidents