



**Independent Monitoring Board
HMP Blundeston,
Blundeston, Suffolk**

**Annual Report
July 2010 to June 2011
for the Secretary of State
at the Ministry of Justice**

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Statutory Role of the Independent Monitoring Board

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

The Board is specifically charged to:

1. Satisfy itself as to 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 which is has
3. **To 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 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.

The Prison.

HMP Blundeston is a category C prison situated in North East Suffolk about 4 miles north of Lowestoft. The prison was opened in 1963 with four wings of single cell accommodation intended for 288 prisoners. The cells in the original 4 wings are of minimal size, with two further wings of multiple cells being added to the main prison block in the 1970s. Two further wings, prefabricated in structure, have been added to the prison accommodation, the latter being opened in 2008. Both of these wings provide a good standard of accommodation with integral sanitation and showers.

The CNA has increased to 524 as a result of the increase in accommodation and although a new kitchen was built in the 1990's, other areas of the prison such as the gymnasium, workshops and office block still have the same capacity as when the prison opened in the "60's". An artificial surface football pitch was provided a few years ago and also a fitness room which is available to prisoners. There is a volley ball court which was also built a few years ago, but regrettably without proper foundations. As a result the court is unusable and needs Considerable work to get it into operation again. A prefabricated classroom provided for gymnasium teaching courses has finally been made ready. Much of the work has been carried out by the gym staff themselves. The recent HMIP report said that a new gymnasium should be provided but the IMB (formerly BOV) have repeatedly recommended this since 1993

The original four wings **do not have integral sanitation**, access to toilet facilities being available, on application, to a duty officer, by remote unlocking of the cell, during times, of course, when prisoners are locked up. Prisoners with reduced daily regimes due to staffing cuts over recent years spend more time being locked behind their cell doors. This means that they spend more time subject to the "Nightsan" operations. This system was considered to be "state of the art" when first introduced in the 1960's but with the rapid progress of conditions within the prison estate is now "way behind the times" in what it provides or fails to provide for prisoners. "Nightsan" provides a system where time limits are set for prisoners in turn having access to the toilet facilities. Only one prisoner on each landing of 24 cells is allowed access to the toilet facilities at a time, so a stacking system comes into operation. Prisoners therefore have to wait to use the toilet and some complain that they may wait more than an hour to get the access they require. "Pots" are provided for use within the cell but this is highly unsatisfactory. The whole stacking process has to be reset if an officer as part of the night patrol has to go on the landing. This causes more frustration and delays for prisoners and makes A, B, C and D wings unsuitable for prisoners who need constant monitoring due to "self harm risks" during night hours.

This lack of integral sanitation has been mentioned even in the House of Lords during the past 12 months following the publishing of the National IMB report on cell sanitation; Blundeston having 278 of the 2000 cells without "In cell sanitation" still within the prison

estate. The system is very unsatisfactory and is rapidly reaching the point when it will cease to function and it casts a shadow over the whole prison and its long term future. A great deal of money has been and is being invested by the Prison Service into HMP Blundeston at this time by replacing the heating system in the main part of the prison and also in re-roofing the centre of the prison and all the workshops. The Laundry has been hugely upgraded in the past 2 years or so to take laundry from other establishments in the Eastern Area. It seems astonishing to the Board that nothing has been done at the same time to resolve the "Nightsan" use and provide integral sanitation. These things could only happen in the unreal world of Government departments. The re-piping work for the heating involves the decanting of one wing at a time. It would have been most opportune to do both tasks at the same time and secure the future of the prison. Further comments about the prison and our vision of it's future can be seen later in this report.

The multiple occupancy cells, on F and G wings, provide poor accommodation, but some prisoners like this arrangement as they appreciate the opportunity to share a cell with others. F and G wing cells do at least have integral sanitation, even though it is shared by several prisoners. The shower facilities on F and G wing are very poor and constantly have to be refurbished to cope with peeling paint etc.

Several "portakabin type" buildings have been recently added in order to provide a computer laboratory and classroom, the latter being used by the "Therapeutic Community".

A new healthcare facility provided by the local Primary Care Trust is now in full operation. It will contribute greatly in improving the healthcare within the prison. The whole facility has taken lengthy negotiations and procurement. It is located in the old boiler house, most recently the home of Industrial Cleaners and has a new dispensary including a supervised consumption area for those on IDTS, office space for IDTS staff plus waiting room, two interview rooms and a group room. The group room includes facilities for tele-conferencing and has four cameras, two static and two mobile, so that prisoners should not need direct supervision by an Officer when being given their methadone/Subutex.

With the new Government policy to make training and learning more relevant to outside employment, changes are being made to the workshops and their current usage. The Textiles workshop will be closed. The other workshops will continue the excellent work from previous years with Carpentry, Welding, Printing, Fork lift driving, Painting and decorating and Industrial Cleaning. In accordance with Government policy, requiring prisoners to work "full time", the print shop will become a place where prisoners can do a "full weeks" work. The logistics of making this work, by providing breaks and catering whilst in the workplace rather than returning to their cells is a challenge, but will be resolved. More prisoners are being released on ROTL to work outside the prison and the expertise within the prison is

being used to provide support for organisations on the outside (see picture on the front of the report and comments later which give more detail). The opportunity to obtain professional qualifications in workshops where they were not formerly available is being strengthened (recommended in HMIP report).

The prison also boasts an excellent, award winning, Recycling Unit. Prisoners are able to work toward qualifications including NVQ's and the Preparation for Employment Qualification, the latter looking at Health and Safety in the "Work environment".

The gymnasium provides not only exercise for prisoners but also runs courses leading to sporting qualifications.

Prisoner Education needs are provided by "A4e".

The NACRO officer has left the prison and has been replaced by a part time officer from another organisation. The loss of the NACRO representative is due to funding cuts and highly regrettable as he did such a splendid job and was so helpful in sorting out very many issues, many of them small but vital to prisoners. There is no criticism at all of the new part time incumbent who is doing well but cannot possibly do in 2 days what was done with an almost full time person before.

Ipswich Housing Trust provided a debt counsellor within the resettlement facility. Funding was to be taken away for this person too. She was previously part time working in local Probation Office sorting out debt for defendants on community sentences. It seems that offending behaviour and debt are closely linked and if debt can be resolved re-offending is reduced. Happily this funding has been restored for this year. Possibly through the involvement of the IMB and 2 local MP's. **The Government in its pursuit of reducing re-offending should look more closely at the relationship between debt and offending behaviour and increase the availability of debt counsellors and make them part of rehabilitative pathways.**

Resettlement has been renamed "Rehabilitation" and a Governor appointed to improve the prison's performance in all areas of training, rehabilitation, education, resettlement and involvement with outside communities.

"Learn Direct" are also contracted to the prison through Aquilla Training and Education. The failure to provide certificates mentioned in last year's report has finally been resolved. The welding and carpentry workshops and their instructors have taken over this aspect of the work and have become accredited and are able to assess the quality of the coursework and then provide the certificates themselves.

The "TRIBAL" representative was seriously ill for some months but is now happily back at work, albeit part time. "Tribal" work to help provide a plan at induction for prisoners to

follow while at HMP Blundeston. This is to ensure positive outcomes for prisoners and give them motivation and purpose during their time at the prison. They can go back periodically to monitor how they are progressing and then Tribal helps with their resettlement plan on release,

NHS Great Yarmouth and Waveney Healthcare are responsible for Medical and Dental care in the prison. (See section on Healthcare) Suffolk Probation Service has a contract to provide services. The member of the Probation Team, who has looked after MAPPA information for many years and more recently the VISOR system, was formerly an officer in Blundeston .He is leaving soon and we wish him well with grateful thanks for work over the years. “Job Centre plus” visit the prison regularly.

The “Ormiston Trust” runs the Visitors Centre. Citizens Advice and also come to the Resettlement Centre. The Samaritans provide outstanding support to the prison and training for the “Listeners” within the prison.

Unfortunately, because Prison Governors have no managerial control over the external contractual services there are frequently difficulties which require long periods of negotiation. We are fortunate that our Governor is skilled in that area and negotiations are consequently reduced to a minimum.

Report Summary and Overview and issues raised by the report

Over recent years HMP Blundeston has had a good reputation for its work with prisoners and the regime it offered.. It was very good at meeting its targets and as a result spent some time at the top of the old “Weighted Scorecard”. The prison at one time reached “level four status“ but it is fair to say that the past 12 months have proved the most challenging for several years. Challenging is the best word to use as that relates to the response by the prison when difficulties arise and whether or not those problems are overcome and the prison moves on and learns and improves through its difficulties. The IMB would suggest that this is what has taken place.

And at the beginning of the year there were still industrial relations problems over the recent budget cuts and the staffing profile required following those cuts. £800,000 had been removed from the prison budget which had meant the loss of 15 uniformed grade officers and two Senior officers. In the autumn the previous Governor, Sue Doolan, moved to another prison and in January this year the new Governor, David Bamford, arrived to take charge of his first prison as number one Governor. In January and February this year Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons arrived for an announced inspection. The inspection result was not encouraging with poorer scores than for the previous inspection. During the time between the departure of one Governor and the arrival of the other the prison was run by the deputy Governor just three months into her first post as a Deputy Governor. Just about the time when the Inspectorate were in the prison HMP Blundeston appeared briefly on a BBC news list as a prison due for closure due as part of the Government’s strategy to reduce prison places by about 3000 over the next two years.

It is the IMB’s view that the Deputy Governor did very well in her “Acting Governor” role and that prison has come through all its problems well, through the integrity and professionalism of staff at all levels. The new Governor has brought a calm air of authority, purpose and vision to the prison, particularly with his desire that HMP Blundeston should become a prison accommodating prisoners mainly from the Eastern counties of England. Many new policies are being drawn up and implemented in response to the HMIP report and its criticism that there were not enough specific policies in place in many areas of the prison. That of course did not mean that the prison wasn’t functioning more than adequately in those areas. However the sense of purpose involving the Senior Management Team in policy making together with the reorganisation of the SMT has been positive for the prison bringing everyone on board and staff at all levels to promote the future of HMP Blundeston.

The industrial relations issues have been resolved so that staffing profiles have been agreed for this current year in which there has also been a cost reduction of just under £0.5 million in the prisons budget. The IMB’s latest information is that funding cuts of the same magnitude will be required in the prison’s budget over the next 2 years meaning at least a

further million pounds will no longer be available for use to work with prisoners. Such cuts are not compatible with the rehabilitation revolution and prisoners doing more meaningful work in the prison and courses relevant to work when they leave prison. The **IMB would suggest that further cuts in uniformed officers would undermine the internal security of the prison.**

The IMB is informed that a full costing process is to be undertaken of each function and operation within the prison so that when the Area Manager asks for further cuts he can look at a “menu” of options and be aware with the cuts exactly what will be lost from the prison’s regime.

The results of the last two years cuts are that only three officers rather than four are now on each wing but this arrangement, about which there was so much concern, seems to be working comparatively well. However, it is inevitable that you cannot quite do with three officers what you could do with four but importantly the security and safety aspects for prisoners and staff has been good. Back in September and October things were a little difficult in the whole atmosphere of the prison but in recent months things have improved considerably and the atmosphere now is positive for both prisoners and staff. It is the view of many that the prison must show an outstanding performance to secure its future if and when a closure programme is instituted by the Government should the prison population reduce in coming months. The uncertainty as to the future is unhelpful to all concerned but the location of the prison when it was used as a “London overspill” has made it very unpopular with prisoners and their families due to the logistics of visits and of course the lack of in cell sanitation, mentioned earlier in the report, does not help the prison’s case for remaining open. However, the Governor’s plan for accommodating mainly Eastern Area Prisoners at Blundeston especially in a supportive and symbiotic working relationship with HMP Norwich provides an identity for the prison. The increased use of ROTL for prisoners to work outside in support of the local community and the use of the resources and talents of the prison workshops to help outside projects provides local community involvement. All this coupled with the intention to bring more IDTS prisoners from Norwich to support that area of work the prospects for the prison are good. It would seem perverse too to have spent so much money on the heating, roofs and laundry to close the prison and until the provision of “in cell sanitation” the prison is unlikely to be a good prospect for privatisation.

The IMB suggest strongly that it should never be lost sight of how difficult it is to manage many of the prisoners within the establishment. That is the case of course for all prisons when behind their walls in such confined areas are housed people with huge criminality who have committed some awful crimes. And yet prison staff manage them on a day to day basis with all the challenges that entails. Even IMB members get used to it all until an event or events make us aware again of the reasons so many of the prisoners are locked up. It is a salutatory experience for those on the IMB who have the privilege of working within the

prison to understanding criminality and realise how much care needs to be exercised when looking at releasing some of the prisoners. This has been highlighted in recent weeks just to give two examples. Two prisoners in the segregation have managed to seriously damage the toilet/washbasin until within their cells. One pulled his metal bed apart and the other using only the remains of his wooden furniture managed to displace the observation hatch on the **outside** of his cell door. The former prisoner did it on the first day the “No smoking policy” was introduced in the segregation unit.

Many continue to pursue criminal acts within the prison especially in bullying and intimidation and also to attempt to deal in drugs and illicit substances. Much has been made too in the media in June about the dangers of radicalisation of extremists within prisons and policies to prevent such developments. All these challenges face prison staff at all levels, whether the officer on the wing or a Governor dealing with paperwork or adjudications or segregation reviews or security meetings and so on.

A strong and most helpful emphasis has been placed in recent months on anti-bullying. There have been genuine attempts to identify bullies and put those considered bullies on a violence reduction programme (more on this is the section on safer custody).

On a different note altogether; one of the issues regularly raised by this IMB is the continual gathering of data in audits and their use in KPT's or targets for the prison to achieve as related to their performance. Against the background of budget cuts and staff reductions the gathering of all this data takes up so much time and reduces the number of staff hours in contact with prisoners. The IMB were delighted therefore to hear of the Government's decision to reduce by 50% the number of KPT's being used to monitor the prison's performance. However, we have learned that the same level of data is still required to be provided as part of the prison's Service Level Agreement. We are told that the information still has to be provided by the Governor to demonstrate that the prison is running properly it is just that some of the KPT's are not used. This scenario may not have been the Government's intention when decision was made about KPT's and the Government may not be aware of the reality of the situation which is that, in spite of their well meaning decision, it has made little difference to the gathering of performance data in the prison. When the HMIP visited the prison they were looking for more data, some related to prisoner outcome, prisoner surveys, more analysis of things like the “Use of force” so that imposes more data production requirements from the prison. Ofsted who looked at learning and skills want their data too, so every organisation wants its own little bit of data to fit in with their criteria, meaning an ever increasing data gathering burden on the prison. Eventually a point of overload will occur and the law of diminishing returns will apply and everything will grind to a halt.

When prisoners commit serious offences within the prison it is only right and proper that they should be prosecuted through the court system. It is understood that Governor's

adjudications and also the awards of the Independent Adjudicator are sufficient for some of the more minor breaches of prison rules. However serious criminal damage, arson, serious assaults on other prisoners or members of staff and, more recently, attempts to escape from lawful custody should receive a tougher penalty than the adjudicators can give. The prison seeks the help of the local police and through them the Crown Prosecution Service in bringing these perpetrators to justice. It seems on the IMB's information that the police seem reluctant to prosecute in many cases and the investigations seem to take such a long time. It may be that they consider that the prison has dealt with the matters under their own procedures. Again the Board are told that the police are properly informed of what has taken place. Contacts with the CPS also show that there is a lack of understanding between them and the police as to actually what has taken place and that affects the CPS when they make their decision as to whether to prosecute or not. In any event prosecutions rarely take place and this is frustrating for the prison. A letter has been written by the IMB chair to the Chief Constable asking for his advice in this matter. Some of the damage done through the actions of prisoners can cost up to £2000, sometimes more, to put right and is why the prison are so keen for proper prosecutions to take place to demonstrate that prisoners cannot do such things with impunity. Those of the Board who sit as magistrates are very much aware that even minor damage to police cells is prosecuted in the courts with the intention that compensation is awarded to help pay for the repairs. The IMB mention this in the report in the hope of a better understanding being achieved between the police, the CPS and the prison, so that fair justice can be administered for those who break the law, whether in the prison or outside it, there should really be no difference.

It has been of concern to the IMB and the issue is of course raised in the HMIP report that the prison is failing to run some of the offending behaviour courses and the Therapeutic Community has been suffering in its function through the lack of psychologists available to assist in the presentation of courses and therapeutic sessions. This however is not really attributable to the prison but rather to the very drawn out recruitment procedures involved. Firstly there is the need to advertise, first within the Prison Service, and then if there is no one suitable to advertise more widely. Candidates then have to come for interview and once suitable person(s) are recognised and appointed the vetting/security check process starts. The whole process takes about 6 months, where the IMB is informed in private industry at least the security/CRB type checks can be carried out within a couple of weeks. Once all that has been completed the new appointee has to be trained to work on the specific course and on it all goes. Psychologists of course can give one months notice and if they use up holiday meaning then they can leave very quickly leaving a huge time period without anyone in post. The IMB, of course, fully appreciates that psychologists, want to move on and advance their careers. It seems amazing to the IMB that when all these departments are part of Government machinery that there cannot be some "joined up thinking" and recruitment processed at a much higher speed. The Government talks of a "Rehabilitation Revolution" but such a revolution is hindered by all these delays. Perhaps a revolution in speeding up all

aspects of the recruitment process should also take place so as to compliment the main thrust of Government policy.

In this challenging year the prison met all its targets apart from the completion of Offending Behaviour Courses, (see reason above), Sickness and Energy and Water Usage. The sickness issues were around long term sick and genuine cases and not related to work issues. Water and Energy related to the new laundry and there is some controversy over the figures, this all together is indicative of the good regime offered by the prison in spite of all the difficulties.

Concerns raised for the Minister.

1. Will the Minister review the proposed budget cuts, realising that prisons will no longer able to fulfil the requirements of the “Rehabilitation Revolution” with reduced funding. The further budget cuts proposed will mean cuts in the regime the prison can offer towards rehabilitating offenders. It is little point making political statements of intent, even when those statements are well meant without providing the funding to support the intentions.
2. Look into building contracts and their poor procurement to ensure better value for money and greater efficiency into contract fulfilment. Insist that the valuation for the replacement of “Night sanitation” is reviewed to see as the IMB are informed the work can be carried out at a much lower cost. **Please see the PS re the laundry in the section on buildings.**
3. Improve the recruitment procedure to prevent “holes in the prison regime” by speeding up the security checking process, making different Government agencies help each other in a more constructive way.
4. Realise that the delays with UKBA and the Probation Service, outside the prison, has a “knock on effect” with prisoners and prison numbers. Improving efficiency and working practices may help. The IMB suggests looking at exactly what the Probation Service needs to provide in the way of reports for prisoners, rationalising the requirements and reducing them where possible to speed up the whole processes with ROTL, HDC and D Category applications
5. Look into HMPS’s continued requirement of all the statistics, no longer part of the KPT’s, about a prisons performance as part of managerial supervision with the intention of rationalising and reducing the requirements to free up prison officers to spend more time with prisoners. The only statistic that really matters is the re-offending rate. Calculations are so difficult for this important figure especially how it

relates to a prison when prisoners will have usually been at a number of prisons. Where was the work done that “turned the prisoner around”? or is it just as accumulation of input?

6. Improve the recruitment procedures for IMB members realising that there are not queues of people wanting to do the work, at least in N-E Suffolk and allowing the rapid processing of applications from wherever they come. This would acknowledge the work done by Board and also how hard it can be at this time in spite of our best efforts to recruit new members

Concerns to the Prison Service

1. Find the funding to provide integral sanitation for A, B,C,D wings
2. Improve the design and planning for Building contracts so the problems encountered with the replacement of the heating will not happen again.
3. Resolve the issue of prisoners’ property in general, particularly a protocol should be put in place to identify the responsibility for damage incurred to property in transit between prisons. A protocol ought to be put in place too when prisons argue about whether property was sent from one and received by the other. IMB’s try to resolve the issues but often it proves impossible and then the Ombudsman becomes involved. Proper protocols would save time and money.
4. Reduce the amount of “Management information” required from the prison in accordance with the reduction of KPT’s. Reducing such a requirement would free up managers and officers to spend more time with prisoners, which is what they are really paid to do. The only statistic that really matters is the re-offending rate and that is such a hard thing to properly calculate and relate to each prison.
5. As requested in the HMCIP report, provide funding for a new gymnasium. The IMB is realistic to realise that this is very unlikely to happen in the present time of austerity. However requests have been made for the past 16 years all to no avail, but perhaps we should just keep asking.

Concerns to the Governor

1. Continue to review the facilities list and make it more “prisoner friendly” to improve prisoner motivation. Especially to allow in general items to allow items in possession which were allowed at the previous prison within the terms, or course of the IEP scheme relevant to the prisoner’s status
2. As already discussed with the IMB monitor closely, we are sure you will, the illegal drugs usage while the prison has more “free flow” and prisoners are released on ROTL to ensure

that these developments, which the IMB applaud, does not undermine the success in maintaining such MDT levels.

Mandatory areas of reporting.

Diversity

Diversity has moved on in the past 12 months to be now about equality and fairness for all and has embraced many areas such as age, gender and disability in addition to race. So we now have an Equality Action Team (EAT) rather than a Race Relations Action Team. This team is chaired by the Governor and includes representatives from all parts of the prison including a member of the IMB. Of course, racial equality and lack of discrimination is still very much part of the concerns within the prison and it is so good to be able to confirm the views of HMIP that there are no racial tensions within the prison. HMIP could not find any racial problems and the IMB have not seen any such evidence either. This is a quite remarkable achievement considering the ethnic profile of the prison with, on average throughout the year, an almost 50/50% split of white and non-white prisoners within the establishment. The number of Race Relations Complaint Forms raised has fallen by 50% in the year. The forms are now Discrimination Incident Reporting forms but fulfil very much the same function as the old forms allowing the prison to investigate any concerns about discrimination against any member of the prison community. The reduction in Race Relations complaint forms was of concern to the previous Governor and the matter was raised at IMB Board meetings to see if the IMB could confirm that there no issues in case the prison's efficiency in this area had become lacking. The IMB confirmed what HMIP later found that there are very few, and those are minor, race relations issues in Blundeston prison. HMIP did confirm IMB's view that Race relations complaints have been handled well by the prison and investigations have been equitable and thorough, balancing what is conceived as discrimination by the person against what is fair and reasonable. The IMB has had no confidential access complaints this year complaining that the prison has not dealt fairly in dealing with race relations complaints.

One can only surmise at the reasons but perhaps there is a general improvement in these areas and prisoners are less likely to look to race as the reason for their difficulties and not to play "the race card" as a means of excusing their behaviour or trying to gain advantage in some way. A prisoner used to run a course on racial/diversity equality for prisoners but it was very poorly attended, perhaps indicating that the issue is not of great importance to prisoners. It is clear that the issue is talked about less at least in the IMB's contacts with prisoners. Of course there is a need to be ever watchful but things are encouraging and this is to the great credit of all prison staff but much more to the officers on the wings who deal impartially on a day to day basis with prisoners of all ethnic backgrounds rather than to the policy makers.

Mentioning policy, a new Diversity Relations policy written to comply with the requirement of HMIP will be completed soon with a copy made available to the IMB.

HMPS has tasked each prison the responsibility to make policy within the terms of the Equalities Act to ensure compliance but also to best identify within each establishment how the requirements of the act are best met. However with or without a policy the prison is doing well.

Concerns were expressed in the HMIP report about the lack of policy towards age and the older prisoners within the establishment. Most of these prisoners of course would be life sentence prisoners some who, regrettably, may spend the rest of their lives within prisons having become so institutionalised. The prison is not suitable for those who need to be allocated "flat" i.e. need ground floor accommodation. That is specified in the criteria used for allocation at the prison, the exception being prisoners coming specifically to be part of the Therapeutic Community. However there is happily ground floor accommodation on I wing so such prisoners can be accommodated. J wing, which houses the majority of life sentence prisoners, also has ground floor accommodation. That of course still provides access problems to the chapel and education which are not on the ground floor. The IMB has had no complaints from the "older prisoners" as regards access to the upper floors, maybe they don't want to concede to their old age. One prisoner who did complain, not an older prisoner, and enquiries were made with Healthcare. There was no official relevant medical history for this prisoner to support his complaint.

Recently a Board member found a prisoner on crutches coming down the stairs from the upper floor of J wing. His leg was in plaster. Enquiries were made as to why he was living on the upper floor. The prisoner assured the member that he had been offered a cell on the ground floor by the wing SO but had declined "As there was too much to move and the leg would only be in plaster for a few weeks and he liked it on the upper floor". This prisoner had not been discriminated against rather the opposite; he had chosen to stay where he was. This demonstrates good practical prisoner officer work.

It has been suggested that the prison should do something to improve access to the upper floors for the chapel and education etc. It is hard to see with the structure of the building to see how lift or other devices could be fitted; they would be vulnerable to prisoners damaging them and would need officers to operate them and with so few staff it is difficult to see where the staff would come from. The Disabilities and Discrimination Act only requires that which is reasonable to be provided and within the prison and its architecture the IMB would maintain that the prison has in place that which is reasonable. The IMB has received no complaints and the Prison Service deals with the discrimination issue by locating disabled prisoners in other establishments.

The prison of course regularly monitors the ethnic profiles of adjudications, work allocations and so on to ensure that at least statistically there are no areas in which there is a discrepancy between ethnic groups in the different functions. I.e. more white prisoners being adjudicated upon than black prisoners. The IMB is again aware of no real concerns, where the statistics do throw up some questions they are looked into and there is usually a good reason for the anomaly.

Segregation

A new segregation policy is being introduced following concerns expressed in the HMIP report. The hope is that the policy will improve what is already a well run, caring and constructive segregation unit. It may be well worth changing the precedent and on behalf of the IMB thank the segregation unit staff for all the help and support they give Board members. Those comments usually come at the end of this section of the report. IMB members turn up at all sorts of times and need to see prisoners and then to discuss issues with staff members to ensure, even though there are segregation reviews for all prisoners, that all the prisoner issues are being met. We need that courtesy and cooperation of staff and that is always forthcoming save for when staff are dealing with a difficult prisoner or some other matter in which security is an issue which will mean the IMB member may have to wait. The IMB are very grateful.

Blundeston IMB, probably like most IMB's, consider segregated prisoners one of the highest priorities and therefore carry out regular segregation unit visits to check that all is well and this is above and beyond segregation reviews, the majority of which are attended by IMB members on Monday afternoons. These regular visits enable the IMB ensure all is well with segregated prisoners and that is what we find.

One of the key introductions in the new segregation policy is a "no smoking policy" meaning that unlike anywhere else in the prison prisoners are not allowed to smoke in their cells. The Board are informed that this policy is in line with most segregation units across the prison estate. Smoking is to be allowed in the exercise yard but only 1 hour per day when exercise is allowed meaning real issues for prisoners who smoke, some of them very heavily, partly too as a "comfort thing". Any prisoner segregated will know beforehand of the no-smoking policy so if they choose to be segregated for their own protection then they know what situation they are putting themselves into. Any prisoner will immediately be offered nicotine patches by healthcare to deal with their nicotine craving. A full smoking cessation compact will be signed and the IMB has been assured that this provision will continue once the prisoner has left the segregation unit and returned to normal location, if they are not to be moved to another prison. That latter scenario is the most common outcome. The ethics of using nicotine patches while a prisoner was segregated and then to stop them would have given the IMB concern but, as above, we are assured that this will not take place.

The Governor has been making great efforts, with some success, to reduce the number of segregated prisoners and to stop prisoners using a move from the segregation unit as a short cut away from Blundeston to a prison of their choice nearer their home. Blundeston is not popular with prisoners as visits are difficult for families especially from London and with small children. Prisoners often get quite desperate for a family visit to reassure them that family matters are all well. Any prisoner attempting to take such a route will be moved even further away from home and may end up with “added days” being put before the independent adjudicator for disobeying a lawful order. Even with prisoners going to the unit for their own protection there is an average of less than 1% of prisoners accommodated for their own protection during the year.

Too often in recent years the victim not the bully has been located in the segregation unit due to failures to properly identify and isolate the bully. The new “Safer Custody” policy with its excellent Violence Reduction strategy is working to reverse this trend with more “bullies” being segregated. (See further details in the section on Safer Custody). Prisoners are allocated under the “GOOD” rules while investigations are carried out. Some of the investigations have taken a long time, too long in the IMB’s view on a couple of occasions, and it is imperative that any investigations are expedited to prevent someone being segregated unjustly if the suspicions of bullying are found to be unsubstantiated. This is particularly pertinent with the no smoking policy in place so as to prevent any prisoner who has not been bullying being denied his tobacco for in the end “no reason at all”.

On the first day of the no smoking policy the segregation was flooded by a prisoner who pulled apart the water pipes/wash basin unit and his bed. The same prisoner “smashed up” another cell before being moved to another prison. There are always challenges for the prison to combat refractory prisoners and their behaviour which at some times can be very hard to manage. Segregation Unit staff have to manage “smash ups”, violence, dirty protests and alike and carry out their duties with continued professionalism. The unit has CCTV monitoring.

The “Special Accommodation” is also part of the segregation unit and has been used 9 times in past 12 months, an average of once every 6 weeks. Most prisoners only spend a few hours in the special cell, average 1 ½ hours which overall is a splendid record by the prison and every effort is made to prevent prisoners being allocated in special accommodation. This happens with violent prisoners after fights or when needing to be removed to the segregation unit and prisoners just won’t go voluntarily. They are taken there under restraint and the IMB are aware that offers by a prisoner to comply so that the restraint can be stopped is tested on the way to the “Seg” and if that compliance is genuine then restraint ceased. The IMB are also aware of how volatile and dangerous some prisoners can be and a controlled release in the special cell is often the safest outcome for prisoner and staff. Prisoners in the special cell are stripped searched and placed in “non-tear” garments. In the

long run this is safest for the prisoner, just in case they may have a concealed item for self harm for while being volatile and unpredictable prisoners are also at their most vulnerable and staff are protecting their “right to life”.

In the past year one prisoner spent many months in the segregation unit while his mental health condition was investigated. It took a very long time and in the end it was decided by visiting clinicians that the prisoner had no treatable mental illness. The prisoner was so well managed by staff and his condition stabilised while in the segregation unit. The segregation unit staff know their prisoners well and sometimes with the firmness of the regime in the segregation unit together with positive input from staff can “turn a prisoner around” and show them a positive way in conforming to the prison regime/

Part of the new segregation policy is a committee which will meet bi-monthly to discuss all aspects of the segregation unit including adjudication results. This committee will be chaired by the Deputy Governor and an IMB member, attends the meeting. The new segregation unit policy hopes to get a more regular visit from a doctor.

Healthcare and Mental Health

Healthcare within the prison is provided by the Great Yarmouth and Waveney Primary Care Trust. There are partnership meetings between the Governor and representatives of the PCT on a two monthly basis. The doctors who work in the prison come from a local general practice and work on a rota basis. Regrettably a doctor was attacked in the throat area by a prisoner a few weeks ago, happily there were no permanent physical injuries but it demonstrates how difficult dealing with prisoners can be and the IMB assume, as we do, that such events are highly unlikely ever to happen. One of the full time nursing staff always “sits in” with the doctor during the consultation and was in the above case able to rapidly assist.

As mentioned in the opening section of this report the new Healthcare facilities have recently been opened to provide a better pharmacy within the prison and also much improved facilities for IDTS prisoners. This finally means that prisoners will no longer be given their medication in a corridor; this is a huge improvement and in one way over due but perhaps it demonstrates how slowly things move with HMPS especially when there are contracts with other agencies involved and their funding. Credit should however be given to the previous and current Governor for their persistent approach to finally get the facilities they require. Outpatient and inpatient treatment is at the local general hospital and works well, apart from the cost of escorts, bed watches etc. One prisoner due for a D cat move stayed at the prison for much longer after getting his D cat, waiting for an operation booked

at this hospital. When he went for the operation many of his records including x-rays had been lost and the whole process was started again and the operation delayed.

The Governor has intentions to increase the number of IDTS prisoners in conjunction with HMP Norwich. D wing will be the location for prisoners on drug treatment programmes so that resources can be better targeted to meet these prisoner's needs. Funding will be provided by Norfolk Health Authority as they would normally have needed to provide the funding for the work in Norwich prison and will do so in Blundeston when it houses prisoners from Norwich.

In the future reorganisations of the Health Provision, Great Yarmouth and Waveney PCT will close and provision for Healthcare will either be provided from the Norfolk or Suffolk Health Authorities. The Governor is concerned that Blundeston does not get caught between the two authorities being on the edge of Suffolk, he would prefer Healthcare to be provided from Norfolk to tie in with the provision of IDTS in association with HMP Norwich and also when more prisoners from the local area are accommodated in the establishment. The IMB strongly support this preference.

In the last 12 months two new services have been provided by the PCT in line with the intention of making the prison's Healthcare compatible and comparable with Healthcare on the outside. The Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) and the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) provide avenues for prisoners to make complaints against the Healthcare received in the prison. PALS is a more informal service and does what it says, to provide liaison between the prisoner/patient and Healthcare to find a way forward in a conciliatory way. ICAS is the more formal complaints procedure where advice is given to prisoners on how to take legal action when unhappy about the Healthcare. The IMB are involved with ICAS in that we collect the complaints in their sealed envelopes and pass them on to the ICAS representative. These new arrangements are a huge improvement in the IMB has always found Healthcare complaints difficult to handle, especially as we are not experts in the medical field and also normally do not have access to medical records and would not want to criticise medical treatment provided. The IMB of course will deal with these matters if requested but now in the first instance would pass the prisoner on to the proper complaints procedures. It is interesting to see how few complaints have been made to ICAS demonstrating that although prisoners will regularly complain about Healthcare in reality their concerns are rather little niggles than major problems. This supports the view that Healthcare provided within the prison is of a good standard and belies the concept held by many prisoners that they do not receive the same standard of healthcare within the prison as they would do on the outside. Sometimes the care is better.

As mentioned in previous reports the level of medication for the prisoners is far higher than would be so for a comparative group of men on the outside. Much relates to the stress of prison life and the need for supportive medication. This medication of course is a currency

within the prison and there are issues with the prescribed level of opiate medication. This poses the dilemma for prescribing practitioners when they deal with prisoners as they would with their patients on the outside and provide “equal” treatment and yet within the prison environment there are problems with having a lot of medication in the prison that can be traded with other prisoners. The IMB has no answer but only to bring the matter to notice, but would advocate consultation to see if the use of opiates can be reduced for the benefit of the whole establishment.

Prison staff tell the IMB that sometimes the Healthcare staff are slow to bring across prescribed medication for prisoners as they are required to do and this provides problems for the prison staff dealing with patients who are in pain and yet their medication is delayed.

Healthcare staff provides an invaluable support to segregated prisoners looking at their mental health and suitability for segregation. Healthcare staff also attends segregation reviews. The Healthcare manager is always supportive of enquiries made by the IMB re health issues for prisoners, as are all the Healthcare staff. Being involved in the Segregation reviews has helped build a rapport between both teams.

The provision of dental care still is a matter of concern due to the long waiting list. This was mentioned in detail in last year’s reports but there are still over 200 prisoners on various lists either waiting for an examination or treatment to be carried out following that examination. Often appointments are cancelled to deal with dental emergencies and so the delays are exacerbated. The IMB chair made enquiries about the dental contract when he visited the Partnership Board with the Governor and learned that the contract is paid per session on a time base with no incentive to the amount of treatment carries out during that session. The contract, the chair was told, is due for renewal in 2012 and it is suggested that when the contract is renewed a factor related to work completed is introduced to balance time spent. The IMB is aware that dentists are “hard to find” nevertheless the PCT, whichever one has to make the contract in 2012, must ensure value for money. The IMB are not implying that the standard of the dental treatment is anything less than good.

Learning and Skills and Interventions

We are pleased to show on our front cover a boat made by two prisoners in the Carpentry workshop. The boat was presented to Oxborough Hall, a National Trust property in Norfolk. The boat was designed to help staff at the Hall access the walls of the Hall from the moat but the quality of the workmanship is so good that the Hall are intending to offer trips round the moat to visitors. The Deputy Governor went with the instructor and one of the prisoners on a ROTL for the boat handover. The IMB chair was also invited and the longer the morning went on so the wider the prisoner’s smile became. The event made the local TV and

newspaper and provided excellent coverage for the prison, demonstrating what can be achieved by prisoners prepared to use the opportunities available to developing skills leading to job prospects within the prison. The excellent news is that the prisoner is now ex-prisoner, he was due for release the following week, has a job and a flat in London using the skills he learned at HMP Blundeston, the IMB wish him well. As a result of this success other opportunities have become available to provide products for the local National Trust Houses. The instructor who saw the request from Oxborough Hall in the newspaper and offered to make the boat if the Hall provided the material deserves great credit for opening up such opportunities for prisoners

Other workshops available are welding, who make some wonderful items including a “park bench” for the local community. Such an item would be very expensive if purchased commercially. There is painting and decorating, the laundry, and the award winning re-cycling unit, highlighted in last year’s report. The unit still saves the prison a large amount of money. With restorative justice in mind the re-cycling unit is using re-cycled wood to provide bird boxes and bat boxes for local nature organisations. The work is done internally and are taken out and fitted by staff members. This is indicative of the practical use of the prison’s resources and manpower to help the local community putting something back into that community through the efforts of prisoners.

The printing workshop, as mentioned previously, will become a 36 hour week operation, following the Government initiative to get prisoners working full weeks’ work to develop the “work ethos” among them. There is work and/or training available for all prisoners within the establishment, this is made easier by the present decant of one wing with the CNA being 72 below normal capacity, even without the full time working prisoners at Blundeston work well. The new laundry provides work for over 40 prisoners dealing with laundry from other Eastern Region prisons. However the floor which cost £20,000 is already coming away and has holes in it which need repair (see section on building later in the report). Education is provided by A4e with courses ranging from basic literacy and numeracy to Open University available. The OFSTED inspection was not encouraging but prisons are different places from the outside world and don’t always fit the criteria that would be applied in external schools or colleges.

When prisoners undergo their induction sometimes the courses/work they go on or even volunteer to do may not be quite what they thought and not at the level of education and training required. The problem is with all courses/training etc. is that they must meet their targets and show that success has been achieved this makes it sometimes a problem for prisoners to change courses. While the IMB would insist that prisoners cannot swap around all the time and must work on what they have started and show determination to succeed there are time when moving courses is appropriate and the IMB would request some wisdom and flexibility in these cases.

The failure to provide certificates for prisoners who had completed their courses has been resolved. The prison has now taken back some funding for the courses and is now registered itself as course provider and can therefore remit results and then print off certificates.

As mentioned in previous years and in spite of the poor gymnasium facilities mentioned earlier in the report the gym produces an amazing number, 10,000, hours of purposeful activity per month and provide NVQ qualifications for many prisoners. It is a vital part of the prisons regime whether for training, learning or just recreational activity and whenever the IMB “pop in” the whole place is a hive of activity with such a good atmosphere and is a credit to all the gym staff. There is also an exercise room with lots of equipment for use of prisoners. Some of the equipment is old but serviceable and of genuine value to the prison

The induction process works well and much is provided by TRIBAL, although the TRIBAL worker was ill for some of the year but is now back part time. Prisoners are given a plan of action for their time in the prison and can go to back to TRIBAL to check on progress as required. This gives prisoners ownership of their time in the prison and works to develop responsibility. Criticism has been made that prisoners are not given full information about the prison within 24 hours of arrival. When prisoners arrive late, Blundeston is at the end of the line for prisoner transport, it is just not possible. There is ample good literature available plus the “Channel 7” internal TV channel which provides all the information that could be required and is available in all cells, apart from the segregation unit. Prisoners spoken to by the IMB members seemed pleased with the induction process.

The Labour Control/Resettlement room still offers a splendid facility for interviews or outside agencies and a drop in centre for prisoners with queries. The loss of the fulltime NACRO worker is to be regretted; at least the Ipswich Housing Trust debt counsellor still has funding for this year. Prisoners benefit from having bank accounts available on release and these were set up by the FTC who have now lost their contract in the prison. That was a while ago. NACRO were to take over the setting up of bank accounts but now the NACRO representative has gone nothing is happening with bank accounts as far as the IMB is aware. This matter needs to be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

It is hoped following the recruitment of new psychologists that all Offending Behaviour Courses will be running again by the end of July. CALM will be the last to start but HRP, PASRO and TSP are already running and the Therapeutic Community is again moving forward in its provision for prisoners. Again the targets culture operates when to achieve the required targets no more than one prisoner can fail to finish the course. This provides huge challenges for facilitators keeping prisoners “on board” for the whole course and following such a requirement can give problems for prisoners who are more willing to carry through the course and yet find disruptive prisoners on the course.

Resettlement has now become Rehabilitation and a rehabilitation revolution is developing in the prison with contacts being made with outside agencies and employers for prisoners to go and work outside the prison on ROTL's. The first two prisoners have started in recent weeks, a huge, but bold step, forward for Blundeston. The intention is for prisoners from within East Anglia to be allocated in the prison and then to return to HMP Norwich, when possible, for the D cat period before release. This provides real "joined up" planning and a new "Rehabilitation Governor", with a Probation Service background, has been brought into the prison to oversee and manage this revolution and she has already developed a dynamic plan of action. (Presented to the IMB) All this demonstrates how hard the Governor, his SMT and the whole prison staff are working to comply with Government Policy and any idea that the prison should close is quite unacceptable.

Safer Custody

Not only is rehabilitation undergoing a revolution but Safer Custody too, The IMB are grateful to the Safer Custody Manager for an excellent presentation at a recent Board meeting of the new Violence Reduction Programme aimed at indentifying the "Bully" and protecting the victim. This is the outworking of the new policy revised last year and mentioned in last year's report. The new practices will turn around the practice of years where prisoners "in debt" or being bullied for other reasons would eventually ask for "Own Protection" and be allocated in the segregation unit and then moved to another prison. Violence Reduction Information Forms Violent Incident Reporting forms (VIRF's) are filled in by any staff member who suspects prisoner of bullying, when information is confirmed a 3 stage process is instituted to "turn the offending prisoner around". An offender supervisor will be appointed and initially the prisoner is put at stage 1 for 14 days observation and if there are no more problems that is the end of the matter. Stage 2 involves the IEP and Basic Regime, stage 3 the Segregation Unit, or course matters can be accelerated if the prisoner commits a serious act.

The big battle is to get the victimised prisoner to "name names" as the threat of being labelled a "grass" is high and once that label is given to a prisoner it will go with him from prison to prison and make his life a nightmare. The IMB have sat on Segregation reviews over the years where prisoners will not name names. It makes it hard for the prison to help them but the realities of life in prisons are always there and can be tough for some prisoners. It is sometimes who you are "locked up with" that is the greatest problem of prison life.

The IMB monitor ACCT documents which are to a good standard. ACCT assessors are not just officers but some of the clerical staff are assessors too, to their great credit showing their commitment to the prison and their desire to expand their working experience.

This may be the appropriate point in the report to mention the challenges of dealing with prisoners with severe mental health and as a result self harm issues. Last year's report mentioned a prisoner very well handled who spent months in the segregation unit while assessments of his mental health were made. During the past 12 months one prisoner in particular has spent a great deal of time on H wing which is the first night care unit. Other prisoners have spent less time on H wing for similar reasons but the presence of such prisoners of course disrupts first night care. Because of the night sanitation problems it is impossible to accommodate these prisoners on the A B C or D wings as the need to constantly monitor them during the night time disrupts the stacking system for night sanitation. The system has to be reset and may mean prisoners spending much longer without access to the toilet than necessary. F and G wings are unsuitable because they are of multi-cellular occupancy, J wing is the Lifers and I wing is the Therapeutic Community. The only alternative is H wing, first night care, and some excellent management of one prisoner in particular and others has been carried out on H wing during the past 12 months. However this means that sometimes not all of the new receptions have been able to be accommodated on H wing, the figure is about 80% of new receptions so allocated. Even in this allocation proper risk assessments are being made to ensure those prisoners in greatest need for first night care are allocated to the appropriate unit. The prison has received much criticism for this pragmatic and practical use of its facilities. The IMB would support the prison and its management of these prisoners and new receptions also using what facilities it has to the best advantage for particular prisoners. The prison can only work with its design and the IMB have understood in monitoring all of these matters and yet been pleased with the quality of care and support given to these prisoners and the progress they have made. We would respectfully suggest that all who looks at the prison do so with a pragmatic and flexible view rather than a narrow view based on preconceived criteria. The latter type of approach, when looking at how an organisation works, can bring about a false opinion as to how that organisation functions. Many organisations who undergo inspections say the same in these days as if somewhere the inspectorate, in whatever form it comes, has become removed from reality, being wrapped up in their own work and for example, in the prison's case lost sight of the challenges faced in managing difficult prisoners, some of who perhaps should be accommodated in Mental Institutions and not in prison.

The Listeners Scheme within the prison provides excellent support for prisoners who just need someone to talk to, and any time of day or night, about some of the many issues which affect them behind bars. The Listeners themselves gain a great deal from helping their fellow prisoners giving them an outlet beyond their own little world, putting something back into society is a very constructive thing to do. The local branch of the Samaritans provide the training for the Listeners, training that is really tough to get through and any prisoner who qualifies to become a Listener deserves great credit. The whole prison is grateful to the Samaritans for their support and commitment. A member of the Samaritans is regularly found within the prison helping the Listeners in their work.

A member of the IMB sits on the “Safer Custody” committee.

Issues of concern and/or excellence

Building Work

There has been an extensive programme of works within the prison over the past months. Some of this was mentioned in the opening section. All the roofs on the workshops have been replaced and the central heating on A, B, C and D wings is in the process of replacement. The IMB has been informed that the roof of the central part of the prison is also to be refurbished. Working within the prison has its complications, particularly with security issues and extra precautions have needed to be taken to prevent prisoners getting on to the roofs during the work. Regrettably there were a couple of roof top incidents during recent months, happily neither of them lasted a long time and were more about prisoners protesting at being at the prison, although there were some indications during the second incident that attempts were being made to get over the main security fence.

In some ways of more concern has been the work done to replace the heating in the four oldest wings of the prison. It is appreciated by the IMB how difficult such work can be in the building with no spaces between the floors made of hard concrete floors with nowhere convenient to place the pipes. Work was started on A wing, it was soon apparent that the location of the pipes on the ground floor outside the wing office was totally unsuitable and would leave the pipes vulnerable to prisoners. The whole design had to be changed and the pipes located elsewhere. C wing has now been completed and the pipe work is better located than it was on A wing. This means that once all the other wings are completed the workers will return and improve A wing to get an acceptable final result. As the result of all this, the work is some months behind schedule and the finish date will be delayed. The IMB chair visited A wing with an engineer and it became clear from the discussions that the planning had been poor, particularly the whole concept of placing heating pipes within a prison, as all the security implications had not been fully appreciated. When issues were pointed out alterations were made but this all leads to delay, whether there are additional costs implication the IMB has not inquired. This matter is indicative however of how often it seems that contracts made by Government Operations are badly negotiated, poorly planned, expensive and slow to deliver. The question has to be asked as to how such a vulnerable and ill conceived design could have been planned in the first place and then approved for construction within the prison. Of course the Governor and his SMT at HMP Blundeston were not involved in the planning, they have only had to “pick up the pieces” of the delays which have developed.

The estimate for the cost of replacing the night sanitation system is huge and it has been suggested that the work could be done at a much lower cost. Is it the inefficient way contracts are made together with the allocation of such contracts made by HMPS that inevitably make the contract for replacing the “Nightsan” so expensive?

The laundry floor is already falling apart has been mentioned elsewhere.

PS The new laundry has been closed due to a burst valve which showered water over a member of staff. It could have been worse as steam would have come from the valve had the system been operating normally. It was discovered that no maintenance manual or schedule had been left by the contractors who now have to come in and re-test the whole system before it can be operational again. This puts 40 prisoners out of work when the Government want them to work.

Needless to say the prison itself has no part in the contracts construction etc. of the laundry but is only there are the final handover so all the responsibility is with the procurement department at HMPS.

Prisoners complain about the awful recesses (toilet and washing areas on the landings). When there were re-furbished many years ago the work was poor and of poor design with low water pressure and tiles falling off soon after the work was completed. These days some urinals are not in place as they block and get flooded. It always seems that building contracts produce poor results but are costly. Better planning and value for money should be sought.

P-Nomis and Prisoners Monies

The previous Governor commented to the Board at a meeting that the new P Nomis computer programme was one of the biggest problems for the prison. Details were not gone into but from the IMB’s point of view the system is less than satisfactory although staff have become adaptable at using it and coping with the deficiencies. The IMB chair met someone involved with the system from HMPS who commented that 85% of the system was working well. That surely is inadequate considering the cost outlay to produce the system.

Prison officers spend many hours looking at screens, the SMT even longer and walking along the main corridor in the office block will find the majority of the SMT hard at work working on their computers. The requirements of more policies and the resulting of outcomes and so on means that computer use will increase and at the same time there are less staff to do the work with the budget cuts. The time to load up “Quantum” and then log on and then go into P-Nomis and log on can seem like at age even for the IMB who have to access the system rarely. Prison officers are required to make notes about prisoners to demonstrate that there is evidence of the good knowledge they have of the prisoners in their care. This comment was made about “Segregation Unit Staff” and yet if they spend the time required

on the slow P-Nomis then they will have less time with the prisoners and know them less well and have less time to work with the prisoner. There must somewhere be a balance with all the information storage and officers be given more time with prisoners, the IMB maintain and have done for years that one of the most effective and constructive activities for prisoners is positive interchange with prison officers in the normal daily life within the prison.

Prisoners' monies still provide difficulties with delays and mistakes and with the system take so long to sort out. Once something goes wrong putting it right is a real struggle. Things must improve as staff spend so long sorting out these issues for prisoners which although minor in one way are important to the prisoner on their confined existence. The IMB find the same difficulties too when we try and solve anomalies/mistakes in prisoners' monies.

Facilities List and Playstations and Prisoners' property

There are still many anomalies with the "Facilities List" and differences between what is allowed to be in the possession of a prisoner at Blundeston compared with other prisons. Rightly there has been the application of the IEP scheme to promote responsibility for prisoners in needing to purchase items from catalogues, for their own use, from their earnings and private cash. Again when problems arise with catalogue ordering they are so difficult to resolve and the whole system needs improving to make it more "User friendly" for prisoners, who after all are using their money and therefore should be dealt with as consumers in the normal way. However as the orders are processed by the prison complications arise when things go wrong and delays are incurred. There has been little or no flexibility with the Facilities list and the application of quite a "Draconian" strictness which the IMB would suggest has caused prisoners to feel victimised at the prison and this is supported by the HMIP report. Even when items are agreed and allowed it can take much too long for the prisoner to get the items. An IMB member found it took about 8 weeks to get property, just basic clothes items, for a prisoner still within 28 days of being sentenced. It was only when time was spent with the appropriate Governor, to check all the details, that the items were finally given to the prisoner who had, right from the start, the right to have the items in possession. Assurances had been given earlier that the prisoner would be given the property but when it did not arrive the prisoner applied to see the IMB member again leading to the meeting with the Governor as above. This was unacceptable and yet the IMB applaud the new Governor's policy to allow prisoners to have certain items sent in from "home" and to increase the flexibility of the Facilities list. The default position seems to be have been "No" and the IMB will be delighted if this changes as it will make our lives much easier.

Last year the Eastern Region prisons were instructed that prisoners were not allowed to have "Playstations" in their possession, "Playstation 2's" (non internet access) had formerly been allowed to enhanced prisoners. The introduction of this policy into Blundeston was

through prisoners arriving at the prison, even though enhanced, were not allowed to have their equipment in possession and it was placed in stored property. The same applied to prisoners who lost their “enhanced” at the prison and subsequently regained their status but were still not allowed to have their Playstations back. This caused huge resentment among prisoners especially as there were still some prisoners with their Playstations in possession while in the next cell another enhanced prisoner would not have his Playstation. This resentment was, the IMB would suggest, part of the very negative prisoner survey undertaken by the HMIP prior to their inspection. The IMB received a number of applications about the Playstations and happily within a short period of time Playstations were again made available to enhanced prisoners. The IMB understands this ruling now applies to all Eastern Area prisons however damage to the prisoners’ perception of the prison and its fair approach to prisoners has been done.

The IMB is aware of the emotions stirred by press reports of “prisoners have Playstations in their cells” and the political need to respond. However the Board would point out that with the increasing cuts the prisoners spend many hours behind cells doors and need to be occupied. TV’s of course help, but that is another moot point as to whether prisoners should have TV’s, and computer games help too. Maybe it is not ideal but then in the real world we have to deal with real issues and care has to be taken by politicians and those high up in HMPS not to overreact to press reports and if decisions are made to take items away they are done fairly for prisoners with proper notice and process. Having differences between prisons and even prisoners in the same prison is unhelpful and needs to be prevented in the future. What the IMB would support is a list of suitable titles of the games played so that prisoners do not play violent games which exacerbate their offending behaviour. The IMB are grateful for the rapid way in which the Acting Governor responded over the “Playstation issue”.

IEP

The Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme has been much improved in the prison and where there were too many enhanced prisoners this is no longer the case. Better use is made of the “basic regime” for prisoners to improve behaviour rather than use the adjudication process. The IMB would wish to ensure that “boards” for regime change and warning notices etc. are carried out with equanimity within the prison so that there are not inconsistencies between wings and officers on how they deal with prisoners. It is not right for a prisoner to receive a warning notice for an action in one circumstance and a prisoner elsewhere in the prison not to receive a notice for a similar action. The involvement of the IEP in the Violence Reduction Programme is to be applauded.

Outside Probation Service

Each prisoner's sentence plan will be produced by an "Outside Probation Officer" who will remain in control of the plan throughout the prisoner's sentence. That, the IMB, would assume, is to provide continuity through each prison and then onto release on license. The prison of course is allowed to update the OASys document which is accessible via the NOMS system. The IMB has found delays in updating reports and sentence plans on the OASys system by the outside probation officers. Prison staff who work in the "Offender Management Unit" (OMU) spend a lot of time communicating with the outside Probation seeking to get things updated as the delays slow down the prisoners progress through their sentence. On one occasion once the IMB made contact the update was done very quickly but one report on another prisoner, is months overdue. The Offender Manager can change a number of times within a few months without the prison being informed. Emails therefore are not answered, temporary staff are employed in the outside Probation Service who then leave and the prisoner's case is passed on without proper information being provided. The Board would request that the system is improved and made more efficient and yet at the same time is aware of the huge caseload for each Probation Officer and that with all the pressing cases on the outside it is possible to overlook prisoners' reports. At the very least proper notification of the prison should take place when Offender Managers change. The IMB would urge for more Probation resources but in the present climate of cuts we realise that this is unlikely to happen but perhaps a way of making the system more efficient for prisoners could be introduced. Perhaps reports from outside Probation could no longer be required for "D cat decisions" and yet that may not be realistic as it is only the outside Probation Service who are fully conversant with "victim issues". Everything is so complicated.

UKBA and Foreign National Prisoners

The UKBA visit the prison every 2 months and hold a "clinic" for prisoners with "Immigration/Deportation "issues. This is really helpful as face to face interview can resolve matters more easily. The IMB chair was with one very difficult prisoner at an interview (with permission) and the prisoner was very impolite to the UKBA representative who was merely trying to help. That incident was regrettable and UKBA staff should not have to endure such things, happily the episode was of short duration. However what is clear is that the uncertainty of prisoners over their immigration issues adds to the stress of their prison sentence. Decisions are usually only made near the end of a prisoner's sentence, when an officer is allocated to the case, this merely adds to prisoners' frustrations and it is impossible to obtain information for prisoners early in their sentence. Prisoners also are retained after the end of their sentence while decisions are made re their immigration status. Also "D cat" status is unlikely to granted while there are outstanding questions about immigration status. It would be really helpful if the UKBA changed its policy and made the relevant decision

early in a prisoner's sentence. Everyone would know where they stood and perhaps then deportations could take place earlier and prison numbers reduced. Also subsequent decisions like D Cat status would then be straightforward, as there would be clarity over the immigration status of the prisoner.

The Immigration Advisory Service (IAS) no longer visits HMP Blundeston due to cuts in the IAS budget. This is of course a loss to prisoners but the IMB understands IAS can still be reached via a helpline.

The Blue card telephone system which helped foreign national prisoners to phone home and keep in touch with families at a reduced cost, the IMB is told has ceased to operate. Prisoners now have to buy pin phone credit which is more expensive. HMPS need to look into finding a system of cheap international phone calls for foreign national prisoners to help them keep in touch with their families. Again the pin phone system is too expensive for all prisoners and is a poor contract and the whole issue of prisoner phone calls needs to be reviewed to provide better value for money.

A Foreign National Prisoners forum takes place on a regularly basis with Foreign National prisoners having a representative from each wing. This forum is constructive and genuine issues are looked into. The prison had a quota for Foreign National prisoners and with the increase in "Eastern Region" prisoners in the prison was below its quota. Prisoner Management Unit then prevented the movement of Foreign National Prisoners on "agreed moves" due to the quota issue. This matter has finally been resolved but caused much frustration for prisoners needing to move prisons for progressive moves in their sentences and yet prevented by the quota requirements.

Resettlement and Short term prisoners

In recent months there have been a number of prisoners arriving at HMP Blundeston with only a few weeks remaining of their sentence. These prisoners frequently either come from HMP Chelmsford or HMP Bedford, both local prisons with a rapid through put of prisoners and no choice but to move prisoners on to training prisons. However, little can be done as regards training and dealing with offending behaviour in such a short time, as all courses have long waiting lists. The IMB does, of course, realise the need to incarcerate prisoners for even short periods if those prisoners will not respond to other forms of disposal. The problem with these short term prisoners is their resettlement needs and finding them accommodation and training and/or education on release in such a short time and this is challenging with targets to meet. This year the prison has achieved a 92% accommodation rate and 35% in finding employment for leaving prisoners which is an excellent achievement considering the present jobs market. With the plan to house more prisoners from Norwich prison, and it seems the prisoners who come from Norwich have longer sentences to serve, the problem of the short term prisoners will diminish.

IPP and Life Sentence Prisoners

Much was said in last year's report of indeterminate sentence prisoners and the problems of many prisoners who are well "over tariff" yet are still unable to satisfy the Parole Board for release due to the inaccessibility of the required "offending behaviour courses". The "Green paper" "Breaking the cycle" rightly advocates changing the law and the making of indeterminate sentences to restrict their use by the courts. However that still does not resolve the issues of the IPP prisoners well over tariff currently within the system. The IMB meet these prisoners on a daily basis and are aware of the frustrations many of them feel and how hard they find motivation in their situation. The IMB recognises that all the prisoners are different and some would be unsafe to release however there are many who are quite suitable for release. The IMB would request that extra resources are found to urgently look into the cases of all "over tariff" IPP prisoners with a review to release those suitable at the earliest opportunity. The correct decision not to give up to a 50% reduction for prisoners who plead guilty will mean that more prison places than anticipated will need to be provided in the future. The Government could solve the "prison places" problem by the rapid release of suitable "over tariff" IPP prisoners.

Life sentence prisoners are well managed in the prison, at the last count there were 58 at Blundeston. They suffer too with delays in parole processes and many are over tariff. However the majority of over tariff prisoners have failed at some stage in the sentence either after release on license or have failed at D category prisons and are likely to spend many more years, if not their whole lives in custody. It is a huge issue facing the Prison Service.

Property

Prisoners' property still remains a major headache for the IMB. Usually the property has been lost at another prison or failed to come with the prisoner. That such a thing can be allowed to happen by the sending prison with all its consequences is an inconceivable thing but it still happens. To try and find missing property is almost impossible. We email other Board's who look but rarely find anything at all. Blundeston is quite good for property management and yet the staff frequently find themselves looking for prisoners property by phoning other prisons and so on. The whole thing is time wasting and totally unacceptable and the IMB would urge HMPS to really make an effort to sort out prisoners property once and for all. However we will not hold our breath as every report for years has made the same request. About 3 Board members got involved in the same case where the prisoner was looking for compensation for property lost when he alleged he had been taken to the segregation unit and his cell door left open. The IMB at the prison were contacted and replied that the prison could not find any record of the claim. The prisoner had a letter from the prison declining responsibility. True story!

Although much is said in the media about the amount of compensation paid out to prisoners each year by HMPS, it can in truth be quite difficult for prisoners to get the compensation that is properly due to them. The Prison Service has a duty of care as do other contractors who provide services. In many situations it is impossible for prisoners to prove the loss for which they request compensations, IMB was told by a senior manager at one of the security firms providing the transfer of prisoners that the company are they are only responsible for the tagged bags and not for damage. However if the company is aware that one of their operatives has damaged property, and reported so, they will pay compensation as a matter of goodwill. Paperwork on transfers is filled in by prison staff and yet damage can occur to items without the prisoner's knowledge. Was the property properly checked at each prison? The IMB has one particular case in mind.

Also prisons say they have sent items, the receiving prison will deny having received the item(s). Who is responsible? So hard to prove and yet both prisons will deny responsibility. In the end the IMB does all it can and recommends involving the Prison Ombudsman. A system of overall responsibility by HMPS and contractors so that damage or loss in genuine cases is paid early in the process should be introduced. A joint fund should be set aside, with an independent "decision maker" so the decision is not left to each prison or contractor who can pass the blame elsewhere. There are many little injustices in the Prison Service which are "big things" for prisoners. These injustices demonstrate lack of care by the Prison Service and cause resentment in prisoners and so work against the policy of teaching prisoners to lead law abiding lives in prison and on release. They undermine so much good work done by prisons. These issues are not about policy but practical care and concern, much more relevant to the daily lives of prisoners who are not concerned whether the prison has a policy but whether they are dealt with fairly in the simple things of life.

HMIP

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons made an announced inspection for 5 days starting on 31st January. The report was quite critical of the prison and made many recommendations. The IMB have had some constructive interchanges with HMIP over their report. Well over 50% of the recommendations have been put into place as part of the new Governor's strategy for the prison. Some recommendations are impossible to put in place because of the construction and geography of the prison. The report is due to be published in a few weeks time and out of this reporting period. The Inspectorate found the prison, probably at its nadir in many years but with much hard work from the Governor, the SMT and all staff the prison is quite transformed since January and bears little resemblance, in many ways, to the prison the HMIP found. This will mean that, like this IMB report when it is published, the HMIP report will be "out of date" when published and therefore no great issues should be made about the comments in the report. The prison should be allowed to move on with its

rehabilitation revolution and not made to look back at the HMIP report and thereby hinder progress.

Post script. The press coverage at the publication of the HMCIP report was very negative and did not reflect the progress that has been made in the prison in the past 6 months. The IMB chair was given an interview on local radio to redress some of the issues. Care should be taken in all press coverage so as not to undermine the morale of prisoner officers who have worked hard to make all the improvements. It is galling for them when they find their work is not rightly given credit and the media seems to be more interested in negative and outdated reporting demonstrating a poor understanding of the dynamics of prisons and prison life.

“CARATS” and “Drugs”

The prison has an excellent “Carats” team working with to advise and support the many prisoners with substance misuse. There is a huge commitment to advising prisoners correctly and provided throughput care so that even after release support can be put in place so that the good work done in the prison is not undermined on release.

MDT levels are running at 2% at the end of the reporting period, an all time low and a credit to the whole prison. With the increase in more free flow within the prison and prisoners being released on temporary license to work outside the prison etc. there is a risk of an increase in drugs being brought into the establishment. The Governor is well aware of the risk and all the IMB is assured all will be done to prevent the concerns becoming a reality.

Requests and Complaints.

Last year’s report highlighted the problem of Request and Complaint forms (R&C’s) being often being dealt with, in the first instance, by the person or their action against whom the complaint is made. Then the prisoner has to fill in a comp 1a form to appeal the original R&C reply which will almost always confirm the original decision. The whole system in this way is perverse. Staff at whatever level should not answer complaints against them but should pass them on to the next level in management so as to expedite the response to the prisoner. Will be HMPS listen and resolve this perverseness?

Energy and Environmental Committee

The Board is greatly impressed with the progress being made by the Energy and Environmental Committee. Considerable savings have been made over the past year by carefully scrutinising the use of Transport, Food Waste, Rain Water Collection and Energy use. To give one example, by replacing old and inefficient lighting tubes not only has the lighting improved the but also offers better security in previously dim corridors giving a very positive benefit for minimal cost. The IMB will continue to attend the committee and contribute in seeking further areas of improvement.

The Board

The Board continues its work in spite of the loss of some members, all through pressure of other things. We have shown many people around the prison with the hope that they will join but we have only two applications in hand at this time and are thwarted in dealing with them as they are “word of mouth” applications and therefore cannot be processed in small numbers. The chair and the deputy chair have been in the Local town with posters and leaflets to try and recruit new members so every effort is being made but it is hard work. Those shown round become concerned in their busy lives of the commitment involved. One new member who joined just over 12 months ago has never taken up her responsibilities and after all the effort to process her application it is frustrating. One long standing member is about to transfer to another IMB having moved house which will leave the Board at a minimal functional level where about 18 months ago the Board was full. Efforts to recruit new members will continue but the process is too complicated and restricted and at least in Suffolk, there are not queues of people wanting to join.

We have had a similar number of prisoner applications in the past year and made a similar number of visits to the prison; please see our statistics.

We are as ever indebted to our excellent IMB clerk who copes with us at the same time as she fulfils her many other responsibilities. She recently won a staff recognition award for her work and the IMB congratulate her.

We are also indebted to the Governor and his Deputy for their reports to the IMB this year and also their open and constructive input to Board meetings. Our thanks also go the rest of the SMT and to all the staff for their help and co-operation in helping us with our enquiries and information they provide.

The Board's Statistics

BOARD STATISTICS	
Recommended Compliment of Board members	13 Increased in this year from 12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Members at the end of the reporting period	8
Number of new members joining in reporting period	0
Number of members leaving in reporting period	3
Number of Board meetings in reporting period	12
Average attendance (please note a new member has only attended one meeting and has since resigned for family reasons, another member has a new job and has training during terms times every Thursday but is fulfilling the rest of her role	6.5
Attendance at other meetings apart from Board meetings	51
Total Number visits including all meetings	382
Total Number of applications received	305
Total Number of Segregation Reviews held <i>(These figures are very different and from those given last year, as the Board has found a better way of assessing the data)</i>	127 :72 hour 85 :14 day Total: 212
Total Number of Segregation reviews attended. All 14 day reviews are held on Monday afternoons when the duty IMB member will usually attend. 72 hour reviews by their very nature are held when needed and may not be attended by the IMB but if they are carried out on Mondays with the 14 day reviews then the IMB are in attendance.	21: 72 hours 70: 14 day

Applications

Code	Subject	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
A	Accommodation	0	4	3	13
B	Adjudications	0	2	7	4
C	Diversity Related	2	6	7	1
D	Education/Employment/Training	3	7	18	6
E	Family/Visits	15	10	11	6
F	Food/Kitchen/Canteen	3	0	7	2
G	Health/Healthcare/Medication	28	15	16	14
H	Property, including money, Clothing and property loss	56	78	63	87
I	Sentence Related, including I.E.P, D Cat, Remission days, Parole, Probation and Re-categorisation	34	53	56	64
J	Staff/Prisoners	0	19	10	15
K	Transfers/Repatriation/Immigration	42	19	29	34
L	Miscellaneous, Phone calls, R&C's Human Rights and Private Matters/Post	28	41	40	45
	Total Applications	225	220	254	305

Comments on Applications. This year's figures reflect the same concerns of previous years. The loss of property mainly at other prisons and difficulties with money and private cash are the major problems together with sentence issues mainly around re-categorisation concerns. The prison accommodates a good number of prisoners with immigration issues due to their status, this is reflected in a good number of applications related to the immigration issues. As the prison becomes more for east of England prisoners less foreign national prisoners will be accommodated and it is expected that immigration applications will fall. **There is a 20% increase in applications this year.**