

INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD



HMP STAFFORD

ANNUAL REPORT
1 May 2010 to 30 April 2011

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SECTION 1

ISSUES TO BE RAISED WITH:

(a) The Minister

1. Notwithstanding previous explanations, the Board remains concerned at the length of time taken to transfer some foreign national prisoners to appropriate detention/immigration centres immediately upon completion of their custodial sentence or, alternatively, the length of time they are retained in HMP Stafford under an IS91 authority (see also paragraphs 23 and 153 below).

(b) Prison Service

2. The Board has highlighted in this report the type of difficulty which a prisoner can encounter in accessing a course, which is part of his sentence plan, involving a necessary transfer to another prison: in the event, after a lengthy two year delay, the prisoner's need was finally met. On the basis of the information available to the Board, the relative dearth in this particular type of course nationally suggests that it is an issue which the Prison Service should, or ought to, address (see also paragraph 66 below). Singleton transfers, in similar circumstances, are often unduly delayed by transport contractors to the detriment of prisoners' interests (see also paragraph 67 below).

3. Notwithstanding current financial constraints on expenditure, the Board would welcome the re-funding of the Performing Arts Licence to facilitate, for example, the re-introduction of the library sponsored music appreciation group and the screen/book club (see also paragraph 71 below), and also the use of radios in workshops and DVDs in the evenings, because of the value of these facilities to prisoners.

(c) The Governor

4. Will the Governor consider, for the benefit of prisoners, arranging for the education block, which stands empty and unused in the evenings, to be brought into beneficial use during those hours as an enhancement of the already impressive improvements in education provision (see also paragraph 64 below)?

5. From the perspective of prisoners' health and welfare, the Board has welcomed the refurbishment of most of the treatment rooms on the wings. However members would wish to see the early completion of one treatment room on C wing which, at the end of the current reporting year, was not operational because of the delay in installing IT cabling for computer use (see also paragraph 79 below).

6. Will the Governor agree to press the South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust to ensure that the recent decision temporarily to increase the weekly dental sessions from two to three is made permanent so as to keep the waiting list to a minimum (see also paragraph 91 below)?

7. The Board feels that, from a morale point of view, staff generally and prisoners indirectly would benefit from a wider and more comprehensive dissemination around the prison of relevant information in the Board's Annual Reports and particularly those references which recognise good working practices and the excellent delivery of services (see also paragraph 98 below).

8. Although recent improvements have been made to enable Board members to monitor prisoner induction programmes, there remain instances where late changes in the agreed arrangements make it difficult for members fully to monitor this important area of activity (see also paragraph 103 below).

9. Will the Governor re-introduce the reclamation unit's waste management course which attracts an NVQ qualification (see also paragraph 116 below) and also the re-employment of the external horticultural tutor from the South Staffordshire College (see also paragraph 110 below)?

10. Notwithstanding current financial constraints, the Board considers that a modest increase in the propagating capacity of the greenhouse would benefit not only prisoners on the horticulture course but also the general appearance of the prison buildings/thoroughfares and also some of the kitchen's vegetable requirements (see also paragraph 113 below).

11. The Board is concerned about the adverse impact which the 20% reduction in expenditure has had this year on the operation of the chaplaincy which has, inter alia, resulted in a reduction of the hours of some chaplains. The Board understands that the chaplaincy is not able to offer the level of support to prisoners that it would wish to, or to offer certain courses which would help some prisoners in their rehabilitation. The Board regularly commends the work of the chaplaincy and the outstanding contributions which it makes in prisoners' interests (see also paragraph 134 below).

12. Whilst the Board recognises the considerable improvements made of late in the arrangements for visitors to the prison and the facilities in the visits hall, members remain concerned about the lack of supervision for the children's play area particularly during mains visits (see also paragraphs 138 and 141 below).

13. Notwithstanding the positive progress achieved recently, will the Governor ensure that efforts are continued to ensure an even higher percentage of prisoners are enabled to access the recreational physical education facilities and particularly those in the evenings (see also paragraphs 144 and 145 below)?

14. The Board has previously expressed its concern that the transfer of Incentives and Earned Privileges review board meetings from weekdays to weekends at times convenient to each wing has meant, in practice, that members have not been able, as they would have wished, to monitor the results of these meetings. As the Board feels it is in prisoners' interests that review board meetings are independently monitored, could arrangements be re-introduced to facilitate this (see also paragraph 150 below)?

15. The importance to prisoners of the existence and operation of the monthly Prisoners' Council meetings cannot be over emphasised and the Board, which has observer representation, has welcomed the recent election of prisoner representatives to the Council rather than the previous policy of nomination. However the Board remains concerned about the cancellation of some meetings without notice and the constant changes in the chairmanship which has led to the perception that decisions taken at some meetings are not always properly carried through fully to implementation (see also paragraphs 151 and 152 below).

SECTION 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

16. The Board is again pleased to report its appreciation of the continued excellent working relationship which it has with the Governor and the prison's management team. The Board also recognises the continued introduction of progressive and welcome initiatives set against a period of uncertainty for the Prison Service stemming mainly from financial constraints. Even so staff morale remains, generally, surprisingly high. The continuous, comprehensive flow of information from the Governor demonstrates the manifest difficulties of managing a complex organisation against the ongoing problems of security and the need for ever increasing levels of achievement. Additionally the Board acknowledges the enthusiasm and dedication shown by staff in their daily tasks which play an important part in the achievement of a largely calm atmosphere around the prison. This, coupled with the largely good working relationship between staff and prisoners, is constantly commented upon, favourably, by members of other Independent Monitoring Boards and visitors during escort around the prison.

17. The Board's previously expressed concerns about the lack of meaningful vocational training courses have now almost entirely been met following the recent creation of the new vocational training centre (VTC) which provides excellent courses in roofing, plastering, tiling, warehousing, industrial cleaning, bricklaying and carpentry. Notwithstanding the current shortage of available space the Board would support, if and when circumstances allow, the introduction of courses in plumbing/joinery, and mechanical and electrical engineering where there is a considerable "outside" demand and therefore better employment opportunities for prisoners after release. The Board reiterates its view that it does not agree with the National Offender Management Service's assessment that such further provision would impact adversely on other areas of delivery. The Board remains impressed by the continued low level of prisoner unemployment.

18. The Board continues to be impressed with the considerable efforts of the Waste Management (Reclamation) Unit and its excellent recycling reputation which benefits not only the prison and prisoners but also the environment.

19. The Governor continues his efforts to achieve occasions when mainstream and vulnerable prisoners are involved in joint activities. The Board applauds such integration measures which produce tangible benefits and would support, subject to security, an increase in this development.

20. The Board again wishes to draw attention, positively, to the care and attention which is associated with the wide range of work undertaken by the Safer Custody Committee, upon which the Board has observer status, and the important role played by the listeners and the local branch of the Samaritans.

21. For the fifth successive year the Board has again recognised the significant and beneficial changes which have occurred, and continue to occur, in the operation of the Segregation Unit. The Board congratulates the staff in the work they perform,

often under very difficult and trying circumstances. The unit's low occupation rate is testament to the prison staff's successful efforts and endeavours. The Board's earlier concerns at the absence of healthcare staff at weekly Rule 45 hearings in the Segregation Unit, which is mandatory, have been met. The Board will monitor, with interest, the recently introduced policy of tackling anti social behaviour (TAB) as part of the wider violence reduction policy, which has replaced the anti social behaviour order arrangements (ASBO) with which the Unit secured considerable success.

22. The many positive benefits to the prison which the greenhouse provides, which includes employment for up to 20 prisoners and a considerable enhancement to the prison's general appearance, have been extensively reported on previously. These measures have included the provision of wooden framed planters, manufactured in the prison from surplus wood products, at several important vantage points within the prison perimeter, thus improving the previous somewhat stark appearance of these areas. This important development will soon be further enhanced by the provision of brick built planters constructed by prisoners as part of their training giving a greater appearance of permanence; additionally associated wooden seating facilities will also be constructed. However there is a need to re-establish the horticulture NVQ qualification following the loss, in December 2010, of the external tutor from the South Staffordshire College (formerly the Rodbaston Horticultural College).

23. As reported in earlier years, and notwithstanding the responses previously given, the Board remains concerned at the length of time which the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Department takes to transfer foreign national prisoners to appropriate detention/immigration centres on completion of prisoners' custodial sentence or, alternatively, to determine their future whilst held at HMP Stafford under an IS91 certificate.

24. Although the amount and quality of healthcare provision is, generally, improving more resources for dental provision should be made available: in this respect it is to be hoped that a recent temporary increase in the dentist's hours will help to reduce the backlog. The Board is pleased to note that steps are soon to be taken to implement a meaningful programme for prisoners to help to counter issues associated with alcohol abuse.

25. The Board's previous concerns, generally, about problems faced by prisoners because of the lack of 'transferrable' courses between prisons have, largely, been met although there is one particular example, later in the Report, which illustrates the type of difficulties which can occur (paragraphs 66 and 67 below) and which can also be exacerbated by delays in arranging singleton transfers.

26. The Board would like to place on record its recognition of the many valuable services which volunteers/voluntary agencies provide for prisoners including Stafford and District Bereavement and Loss Service, the Halow Trust, the Friends of Stafford Prison, Quakers, prison visitors to name but a few.

SECTION 3

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

27. The Prisons Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an Independent Board appointed by the Home Secretary (now the Justice Secretary) from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

28. The Board is specifically charged to:

- (a) satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release;
- (b) inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority, as it judges appropriate, any concern it has;
- (c) 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.

29. 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, with limited exceptions, to prisoners' records.

SECTION 4

DESCRIPTION AND FUNCTION OF THE PRISON

30. HM Prison, Stafford, is a category C adult male training establishment with a certified normal accommodation of 741 apportioned as to 332 vulnerable and 409 mainstream prisoners. Being one of the oldest prisons in the country, it is a typical example of a town jail built in 1794 with further wings being added in 1834, 1844 and 1852: much of the prison is “listed” for planning purposes. The prison closed between 1916 and 1940.

31. Each of the six main blocks has four landings and each has accommodation for in excess of 100 prisoners. Each wing has in-cell sanitation and a shower block. The Main Hall comprises A, B and C wings and accommodates mainstream prisoners with B wing also being used for detox, drug therapy and as a healthy living unit. D wing, which also accommodates mainstream prisoners, and is used for induction, accommodates the Healthcare Centre and the Segregation Unit located below. The Crescent houses E and F wings, for vulnerable prisoners, with F wing also being used for induction. G wing, which is a single cell, two storey prefabricated building for 40 prisoners, was constructed in 2004 and is now used as part of the successful “Stepping Stones” project which is available to all prisoners on a compact prior to transfer to category D prisons. Consideration is being given to enhancing this concept by providing a separate category D facility for up to a further 40 prisoners. Apart from G wing, double cell accommodation is normal for almost all prisoners. The quality of accommodation and facilities in G wing is in stark contrast to the remainder of the prison.

32. All prisoners must attend work which includes employment in the workshops, activities which are integrated with the physical education regime or educational provision, various forms of vocational training, work in the kitchen or laundry or some other form of constructive activity. All activities are designed to include some element of basic and/or key skills outcome or NVQ accreditation. HMP Stafford continues to organise a whole range of courses including enhanced thinking skills, drug awareness and drug therapy, alcohol awareness and substance misuse, relaxation classes, coping skills and relapse prevention measures.

33. In 2003 HMP Stafford partly changed its direction by dedicating almost half of its capacity to vulnerable prisoners, and providing a regime based on the delivery of offending behaviour programmes; a limited number of these prisoners are in the 60-75 years age bracket which can, and does, continue to present additional management problems, particularly from the medical and employment perspectives.

34. There is a visitors’ centre in a freestanding building opposite the prison together with a visits room and tea bar within the prison. There are ten workshops which provide, inter alia, IT work (including computer repairs for despatch to local schools and to African schools), light assembly/electrical work (eg trailer boards, air

hoses etc), tailoring/sewing (a wide range of domestic/industrial type clothing) and a Braille/printing/repair workshop. There is a separate and successful painting and decorating unit, a busy laundry workshop, and a progressive waste management (reclamation) unit. The impressive vocational training centre, which came into operation in July 2009, was a most welcome development, which the Board had advocated for several years, and has done much to enhance the prison's role as a progressive training establishment.

35. Healthcare facilities, including dentistry and chiropody, are provided, under Service Level Agreements, by the South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT); the library staff are Staffordshire County Council employees. Overall education and training provision, with the exception of horticulture (South Staffordshire College), catering and hospitality (the Holiday Inn organisation) and laundry operations (Stoke College) was supplied by City College, Manchester. There is an active and progressive chaplaincy providing support for all the main religious denominations.

36. As at 30 April 2011 the number of employed full-time equivalent staff at HMP Stafford was slightly less than the corresponding date last year. Efficiency savings of about £320,000 were required in 2010/11 with approximately the same amount next year. The Board will monitor any developments which become evident as a result of these measures.

37. The regime at HMP Stafford aims to give prisoners a structured sentence plan and, where possible, provide a range of facilities, as part of the resettlement programme, designed to assist prisoners in meeting the demands of life after release.

SECTION 5

THE BOARD

(a) Strength and commitments

38. The authorised strength of the Board, which has a good balance of age, gender, experience and background is 16. At the end of this reporting period there were 10 members of whom two had each been granted six months leave of absence and one of whom will be resigning in July 2011. Steps have been taken to recruit seven new members who it is hoped will be appointed in June/July. Board meetings are held on the first Monday of every month. Rota visits are undertaken on a fortnightly basis which may be increased to weekly when the new members are established. However, members are encouraged to undertake inspection type visits and attendance at prisoner inductions when in the prison for other purposes, eg prisoner applications, Rule 45 boards and adjudication hearings.

39. The Board is represented, in an observer capacity only, on the Prisoner Council and 18 committees within the prison where its presence is felt appropriate: however, to keep within the Board's expenses budget, members do not attend all the calendared meetings but are also supplied with agendas/minutes, etc for those meetings not attended. Unfortunately some meetings continue to be cancelled at short, or sometimes with no, notice which annoys members because the result can be abortive journeys to the prison and/or the tandem inconvenience caused. However, members do understand the daily difficulties which prison management face in ensuring that such calendared events are held. Members are also allocated areas of special responsibility (17 areas at present) and report appropriately to the Board as this cascade principle, including also their attendance at committee meetings, helps to keep all members abreast of a wide range of developments within the prison. This arrangement also gives members a special insight into specific prison procedures which would not otherwise be available to all members and provides an ongoing valuable source of information which can result in a sharper focus on contemporary issues.

(b) Training and information

40. Training sessions, including recently introduced twice yearly training and development meetings, take place when guest speakers from specific areas of the prison talk about their particular area of expertise: on occasion they also similarly attend Board meetings when the need arises. In addition to the Secretariat's nationally based training courses and local and national conferences, the Board is represented at the twice yearly meetings of IMB Chairmen of West Midlands prisons. Visits to other nearby prisons are normally undertaken at least annually but, because of the absence of an established Board Development Officer during much of 2010/11, such a visit has not been arranged this year. Board members from HMP Drake Hall visited HMP Stafford in November 2010.

41. Members, and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman in particular, continue to have frequent contact with the governor grades and other senior staff in the prison on

a wide range of issues, and are ready to give talks on the work of the Board to local organisations.

42. The IMB is kept well informed about events in the prison through a prison weekly newsletter; the Governor's monthly diary presented at its meetings; the minutes of the key senior management team meetings, staff briefings and monthly heads of functions reports. Another publication includes a monthly 'What's On' internal magazine for prisoners which covers a wide range of useful information, all of which provide a broad view of any new initiatives or problems. The Board is particularly appreciative of this consistent flow of useful information which demonstrates the difficulty of managing effectively a complex organisation against the ongoing problems of security, financial constraints and the need for ever increasing levels of achievement.

43. As previously reported the Board decided in February 2010 to sponsor an arts and literary competition open to all prisoners with a total of £50 prize money to be awarded to the winners to be donated to an acceptable charity of the prisoners' choice. The competition was organised by Manchester College as part of the prison's educational programme and was judged by four Board members. The competition, which has been named 'The Peter Tams Award' in recognition of Mr Tams' outstanding services to the Board from 1989-2009 and which is funded by Mr Tams from a family charitable trust, attracted 61 exhibits and proved to be a resounding success. The arts competition was won, jointly, by two prisoners producing one exhibit, and the literary competition was won by one prisoner, each of whom received a small suitably inscribed wooden shield: all exhibitors received a certificate of participation and a personal letter of recognition from the four judges. The prisoners' prize money was donated equally between Katharine House Hospice, Stafford and the Donna Louise Trust (a hospice for children) in Stoke-on-Trent. The competition will be repeated this year and will culminate in presentations in October 2011.

(c) Statistics

44. As mentioned in the last Annual Report (paragraph 43) the Board's review of streamlining the way in which applications from prisoners are processed has resulted in a considerable decrease, as indicated overpage, in the number of applications received in 2010/11. Members now require prisoners to confirm, on the application form, that they have previously made every effort to resolve their questions through consultation with prison staff before making formal application to see a Board member. Experience has confirmed the Board's view that the decrease was achieved almost entirely through the closer, initial involvement of personal officers: that improved arrangement is now well bedded in. Although this year's total is double that of last year, the trend is down compared with previous years.

Board	
Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	13
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	10
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	0
Number of members leaving within reporting period	3
Number of Board meetings during reporting period	12
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	9
Number of attendances at meetings other than Board meetings	75
Number of visits to the prison (including all meetings)	423
Number of applications processed	88
Number of confidential requests/complaints processed	16
Number of segregation reviews held	36
Number of segregation reviews attended	36

Applications					
Subject		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
A	Accommodation	2	3	0	5
B	Adjudications	2	6	1	0
C	Diversity related	5	2	1	0
D	Education/employment/training	9	10	5	7
E	Family/visits	14	26	5	3
F	Food/kitchen related	0	2	2	1
G	Health related	6	20	1	6
H	Property	23	55	3	10
I	Sentence related	28	27	4	20
J	Staff/prisoner related	12	8	4	1
K	Transfers	15	36	8	9
L	Miscellaneous	44	42	9	26
	Total number of applications	160	237	43	88

SECTION 6

DIVERSITY

45. For the majority of the period covered by this Report, diversity issues continued to be addressed in a comprehensive and meaningful way. For example the Induction programmes for all staff and prisoners incorporated details of well published departmental policy statements on diversity in the widest sense.

46. The Race Equality Action Team (REAT), which was chaired by the Deputy Governor, met monthly and comprised prisoner representatives, Heads of Functions and an IMB member in an observer capacity. Prisoner focus groups reported any issues/perceived conflicts direct to REAT which was obliged to ensure compliance with race relations legislation, the elimination of discrimination within the prison and the creation of meaningful equality in all areas. This objective was achieved often with distinction. REAT's annual report was distributed to all wings and language variants were produced including copies in Braille. Quality assurance was logged by an external agency whose reports were published monthly through REAT and formed part of the prison's annual report on diversity.

47. Significantly although the diverse activities of the prison, for example catering, education and religion, had widened over time, diversity issues appeared progressively to have taken a somewhat lower profile since issues of race, culture, age and sexuality appeared to be less of a major concern of prisoners in general than in previous years. Overall the effectiveness of the foregoing strategies was enhanced by the knowledge that all outputs were auditable and subject to detailed scrutiny.

48. In April 2011 certain provisions of the Equality Act 2010 came into operation which will have a direct effect on prison management's handling of all equality issues affecting both prisoners and staff and which will, largely, supersede previous measures under the general heading of diversity. Prison management is devising a comprehensive strategy to meet its statutory obligations by establishing groups/committees, each led by a governor/manager, to cover the necessary distinct characteristics, ie age, disability, marriage/civil partnership/religion and belief; pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation; and race. These groups/committees will produce action plans and report as regularly as necessary to a co-ordinating Equalities Committee to ensure, inter alia, the elimination of unlawful discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity. Simultaneously a Scrutiny Committee, formed jointly with representatives from a nearby prison, will act proactively to monitor the situation on an ongoing basis. The amount of work involved in introducing and monitoring all these issues will be considerable.

SECTION 7

LEARNING AND SKILLS

(a) Education

49. The Board understands, but nevertheless regrets, the financial constraints that led to the prison not replacing the Head of Learning and Skills when she left in October 2010: a Governor now oversees the work of the department. Whilst he does not have the educational background and experience of his predecessor, he has displayed a pragmatic approach to the task and has given consistent support to the Education manager who is employed by Manchester College. The Governor's direct contact with the prison's senior management team has been important.

50. The manager leads a team of 50 staff which includes teachers, vocational instructors and trainers, administrators and learning support practitioners. Prisoners, nominated by their tutors, often "Toe by Toe" (providing support for prisoners with learning difficulties) mentors, undergo a two week course and now act as classroom assistants, both in the vocational training centre (VTC) and the adult learning centre (ALC): this responsibility attracts extra pay for those prisoners.

51. Manchester College continues to be the main education provider offering over 20 courses covering all key subject areas including basic competency in english and mathematics, information and computer technology and also social and life skills. Participants within the now well established VTC must be willing to work towards Level 1 Mathematics and Literacy which is supervised by the tutors. All prisoners work towards nationally recognised certificates awarded by various examination boards including City and Guilds, OCR, National Open College Network, Construction Alliance Awards and the British Institute of Cleaning Science. ESOL (english speaking other languages) courses cater for prisoners whose first language is not english, over 30 different languages being involved. Holiday Inn continues to sponsor the hospitality and catering courses and guarantees a job interview for those prisoners who satisfactorily complete their course.

52. The annual teaching hours have increased to 34,500 and the monthly attendance target of 80% is often over achieved. There is education and training provision for 200 prisoners in the morning and 190 in the afternoon.

53. Prisoners are assessed on entry to the prison and though there is obviously a range in ability up to Level 2 GCSE grades A to C, the vast majority are at Entry Level 3 indicating that they have not previously achieved any national equivalent qualification. A particularly successful group, Getting Started, was held during the year and this involved a small group of prisoners from both sides of the prison who signed a compact and were encouraged to support each other. This resulted in an excellent outcome which hopefully may lead to the formation of an intermediate group.

54. The Shannon Trust “Toe by Toe” scheme has shown a huge improvement. In the month of April 2010 only 45 minutes were spent involving prisoners learning to read: in April 2011 19 mentors were assisting 25 learners, spending the equivalent of 86.5 hours on this activity. This was achieved largely by allocating time to a dedicated teacher who has successfully promoted the project and has encouraged a more co-ordinated approach between the adult learning centre (ALC) and the wings.

55. Expressive Arts also play an important part in the curriculum. Prisoners have the opportunity to try a variety of activities. Some produce art work in various mediums of a very high standard which they are encouraged to submit for the national Koestler Trust Awards and, latterly, for the Peter Tams Awards (see paragraph 43 above). Together with music, drama and creative writing, this welcome involvement enlarges the experience and widens the outlook of men who have often done nothing like this before coming into prison.

56. JHP is a private agency contracted from the Government. Its task is to support education by making a presentation to the prisoners as part of their induction process and then interviewing them as they serve their sentences and preparing them for release. Each prisoner receives a positive and clearly laid out student handbook with information about the many courses available, learners’ entitlements and a mission statement. Prisoners are encouraged to make their needs, opinions and views known.

57. Regular learner surveys and interviews take place. In February 2011, for instance, the Focus Group selected five learners and classroom assistants who then interviewed 50 learners from the ALC and VTC. The overall response was very positive, with appreciation being expressed about the staff and quality of teaching, guidance and support: this resulted in a curriculum review.

58. Leaflets about the courses and training are readily available and the VTC manager has displayed a range of professionally produced, eye catching posters in key areas of the prison including all wings. This action is enhanced by regular contributions to ‘What’s On’ being the monthly internal newsletter circulated to all prisoners. A working party of those prisoners who have completed the painting and tiling courses in the VTC is employed refurbishing the education building and it is envisaged that the prisoners’ efforts will be extended to other parts of the prison.

59. A major new initiative has been the virtual campus and student support services. This opened in March 2011 in a spacious multipurpose room. Prisoners in the last year of their sentence have limited internet access by way of eight computers and are able to create their CVs and undertake job searches. Another innovative course is OnTrak, a project funded by the European Social Fund through Manchester College. Its stated aim is ‘to help prisoners to gain new skills in a field that interests them, to find work that will last, and sort out the problems that stand in the way’. Eligible prisoners, ie those within a year of release and entitled to live and work in the UK are able to refer themselves to a dedicated caseworker who carries out a lengthy, in depth interview and sends reports to JHP, the prison’s offender management unit and the Education department.

60. Currently a pilot study, possibly the only one in the country, is being undertaken with the Open University. As telephone tutorials and visits are difficult to establish and are expensive in terms of staff time, a handful of prisoners undertaking the foundation course can send e-mails to their tutors who then respond by way of the Education staff. It will be interesting to see how this unique development progresses which the Board will monitor with interest.

61. Various successful open events have been held during the year. Learner success has been celebrated in graduation ceremonies, an opportunity to present certificates and awards to successful prisoners. These have been very pleasant, affirming occasions with lively contributions of music and drama from the Creative Arts Group.

62. During a week in November 2010 an exhibition remembering the Holocaust was arranged in the chapel and invited outside speakers were welcomed and appreciated. On another occasion prison/probation representatives, employers and representatives from colleges in Stafford and the West Midlands met prisoners nearing the end of their sentences to focus on their future needs, ie housing, employment, further training, etc. This was a well attended and useful event. One lunch time the hospitality suite was opened when prisoners on the catering course excelled in preparing and serving food for staff across the establishment: this proved very successful and raised £500 for a Romanian charity.

63. Currently a lead member of staff is being sought to tackle specifically the needs of those prisoners with learning difficulties and disabilities. If successful this innovative strategy will result in a very positive achievement which the Board strongly supports.

64. There are still some concerns. Art remains a problem for mainstream prisoners who do not have proper access because it functions in a 'vulnerable' area of the prison. The education block stands empty and unused during the evenings and whilst some staff would be prepared to be flexible and participate in evening events, unfortunately there are no officer escorts available at present.

65. Education is one of the most important pathways in the effective rehabilitation of offenders and the Board sometimes wonders whether the department receives the recognition it deserves and is as valued as other parts of the Prison Service. In this respect great credit must be given to the Education Manager who has an inspirational but realistic approach to his role. He seizes opportunities to raise the profile of education within HMP Stafford and to enhance the services offered to prisoners. He is a good delegator and leads an enthusiastic, gifted and dedicated team.

66. The Board wishes to highlight the considerable difficulties some prisoners have in accessing certain obligatory courses. The particular instance which caused the Board much concern involved a post tariff IPP prisoner (indeterminate length of sentence for public protection) who was required to undertake a High Intensity Health

Relationships Course as part of his sentence plan. This course, which is not organised at HMP Stafford, is fairly lengthy lasting six to seven months and is only offered by about six category C prisons, mainly in the south of England. Understandably these prisons will initially offer places on these courses to their own prisoners. The prisoner concerned had been attempting to obtain a place on one of these courses for two years and, because he had been unable to do so, had twice been refused parole. His situation was compounded by the distance his visitors might have to travel if he had been transferred to another prison further from his home, not to mention the usual prison to prison singleton transport difficulties. Finally, after even more time and very considerable effort by the appropriate Governor and persistent personal contact from HMP Stafford's Offender Management Unit staff, the prisoner was eventually transferred to a category A prison in the east of England which had been able to accommodate a few category C prisoners requiring attendance on this particular course. The fact that there were, apparently, only three places remaining on the course for several external applicants suggests that this may be an issue of principle for the prison estate as a whole.

67. The Board considers it singularly unfortunate that such a delay occurred despite strenuous and prolonged efforts by staff at HMP Stafford to assist this prisoner in his need to attend an obligatory course as part of his sentence plan. Other instances, although not of such long duration, continue to happen. These include unacceptable delays involving prisoners who have to transfer to another prison to undertake a course, as part of their sentence plan (often connected with anger management) which is not available at HMP Stafford. These delays are often exacerbated because of the perceived reluctance of the transport suppliers to countenance singleton transfers. The Board appreciates that prison management has little or no control over this situation but often the results, understandably, have disproportionate negative effects on the prisoners concerned.

(b) Library

68. The well used library, which is a centrally sited, two storey modern building, also accommodates the Flexi Learning Centre on the ground floor which contains computers and lap tops. There is one full-time and two part-time librarians together with two prison orderlies who are also "Toe by Toe" mentors. On the first floor is the Braille transcription unit, a large print workshop and a Story Book Dads workshop. The staff have devised a comprehensive timetable for the use of the building, by both main stream and vulnerable prisoners, including specialist groups such as Age Concern, the Shannon Trust's "Toe by Toe" initiative, unemployed prisoners and cleaners.

69. The library, which is well stocked with about 7,000 books and which is attractively laid out, also contains foreign language magazines and books. Efforts are made to match the books available to the language needs of prisoners and it is pleasing to note that there has been a steady increase in the numbers using the library. A new innovation provides for prisoners who pay a joining fee to borrow music CDs:

this may be extended to allow foreign prisoners to borrow basic CD players to help to improve their language skills.

70. The Six Book Challenge also took place during the year whereby prisoners are encouraged to read, keep a diary and comment on six books: as an incentive, staff are proposing to offer book token prizes next year. Prisoners are also encouraged to write book reviews.

71. General financial constraints have affected the library service - for example the number of hours of library service staff has been reduced. In addition as the Performing Arts Licence has been revoked, it is no longer possible to organise either the music appreciation group or the screen/book group. However, staff are exploring the possibility of organising a Saturday scrabble/chess/draughts club or a hobbies club. A librarian now oversees a regular poetry club on Saturday mornings.

72. A further new initiative has been the creation of an attractive, lively and interesting Library Links newsletter which contains, among other contributions, the library timetable and comprehensive information about the services available which is distributed throughout the prison. Overall there are now fewer problems concerning the availability of staff escorts.

73. With the encouragement and practical support of the Governor appointed to manage the Learning and Skills portfolio, the staff are raising the profile of what, in the past, was perceived to be an undervalued service. The library is collaborating with parts of the prison other than Education – for example liaising with instructors in the Vocational Training Centre to supply technical books relating to the various courses, visiting the Segregation Unit and passing books to sick prisoners.

74. Library staff are knowledgeable, helpful, creative and dedicated and they make a small hard working team. The Board applauds their efforts. Against this background, the library offers prisoners a relaxing glimpse of the outside world and the hope is that it may give them the motivation and confidence to make the best benefit of libraries after release.

SECTION 8

SAFER CUSTODY

75. The Board continues to acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by the Safer Custody Co-ordinator (SCC), which covers the violence reduction scheme (VRS), anti-social behaviour strategy and assessment care in custody teamwork. He is ably supported by VRS wing representatives who assist in monitoring these activities and providing reports at the monthly Safer Custody meetings.

76. The Board is pleased to note a continuation of the recent improvements in attendance and representation from essential areas of the prison at the monthly meetings. In the absence of a healthcare representative, which is now less common, information is supplied beforehand to the Safer Custody Co-ordinator for report at the meeting.

77. The Board particularly commends the valuable reporting information from the VRS Co-ordinator who provides a comprehensive monthly report retrospectively to the Safer Custody meeting covering new receptions, levels of disturbance, cell sharing risk management, investigations of non accidental/suspicious injuries, adjudications and various aspects of anti-social behaviour. A pilot scheme for managing new reception high risk prisoners began in September 2010 and operates in tandem with the previous processes with no problems so far being identified.

78. The Board also continues to commend the work and commitment of the listeners who have been selected, interviewed and trained throughout the year by the local branch of the Samaritans. It is pleasing to note that the levels in the numbers of listeners across both main stream and VP wings has been maintained: listeners are also now employed in Reception. A listener representative attends Safer Custody meetings and presents a report on Wing/Care Suite listening hours and any issues raised by the listener team of volunteers. The Board is impressed by the level of participation of listeners in these meetings and the value which prison management attaches to their contributions. The Board was also impressed by the special Samaritan charity event which took place in the prison in October 2010. Talks were given by Samaritans and listeners at this fund-raising event which proved to be very successful.

79. There has been a reduction in the use of the Care Suite, with more listening hours taking place on wings. However, the Board is concerned by the delay in the refitting and the re-instating of the main Care Suite on D wing, the upgrading of the heating system in the B Wing Care Suite together with one room on C wing which requires IT cabling for computer use.

80. The Board understands that there are an increasing number of prisoners arriving at HMP Stafford who had their assessment care in custody (ACCT) documents closed shortly before their transfer only to have them, of necessity, re-opened upon arrival; this predictably, has contributed to the prison's number of ACCTs. Additionally it has been observed that an increasing number of prisoners arrive without their required medication. The Board will monitor both these aspects in the coming months.

SECTION 9

SEGREGATION UNIT

81. The Governor's policy of regarding the Segregation Unit as a short-term measure for disruptive/manipulative prisoners has become even more effective and is now well embedded and understood: only good behaviour will result, as appropriate, in a transfer out of HMP Stafford and certainly never directly from the unit. As a result its occupancy level remains low, on average about three prisoners any one time.

82. The ASBO 1, 2 and 3 system was replaced in April 2011 by TAB 1 and 2 (Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour) which lasts for 14 days. The unit's policy of isolating the bully rather than the victim is still upheld, as are the effective interventions undertaken by Segregation staff.

83. IMB members attend Rule 45 hearings weekly and Adjudication Boards each fortnight, and they also speak to prisoners who are not scheduled for review: notes are kept on prisoners in separate IMB files. The unit is also a compulsory part of members' rota visits. The room for these hearings is still of a good standard and the two whiteboards detailing the prisoners' current status is clear, relevant and always up to date. Board members rate the standard of adjudications as consistently high as they are usually conducted by the Governing Governor (or deputy if he is away) but Rule 45 procedures are more variable due to the different styles of each Governor leading them. Prisoners are always given the opportunity to make their own representations in all R45 and adjudication meetings. They are usually introduced to the IMB member immediately prior to the commencement of the hearing which is a noted improvement.

84. Another improvement is the 100% attendance at Rule 45 Boards by healthcare staff, although the level of their contribution to the review is often minimal. Subject to confidentiality there are occasions when Board members would benefit, during the hearing, from having more information about prisoners' health and well being. The Board is aware that the Minister has indicated that there is no requirement for psychology staff to attend R45 Boards but members still feel that there are limited occasions when this arrangement would be beneficial to the hearing process.

85. The nominated IMB member is now informed by e-mail of a Segregation unit admission, usually within 24 hours, and this arrangement has shown real improvement in recent times. However, communication needs further refining, eg how to ensure contact if the nominated IMB member is not available (work on improving this has begun at the time of writing this report).

86. IMB attendance at Use of Force meetings following Rule 45 Boards has also just begun, as has a Segregation Monitoring and Review Group (SMARG) which the nominated IMB member will attend on a quarterly basis in an observer capacity.

87. Board members continue to hold Segregation staff in high esteem: for their creative interventions, their after-care on the wings, their professionalism, patience and concern for even the most obdurate of prisoners. It is pleasing that Segregation staff are now offered free inoculation against diseases which could result from close contact with prisoners in their care.

SECTION 10

HEALTHCARE

(a) Primary Care

88. Healthcare is provided by South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT). It is understood that provision is likely to transfer to a new Partnership Trust and monitoring of services will need to be maximised to ensure that there is no lessening of current service levels to prisoners. During the reporting period a clinical operations group, which includes representation at a senior level from the prison, the PCT and pharmacy contractors met on a bi-monthly basis. A Board member attended in an observer capacity. Staffing levels during the year were commensurate with the healthcare profile.

89. There is no in-patient facility at HMP Stafford and provision of bedwatches in local hospitals has continued to impact on financial resources and the prison's operations when officers are assigned to watch duty. A recent protocol change will ensure that, if possible, through negotiation a prisoner with a 24 hour healthcare need may return to his previous establishment if there is an in-patient facility available. All prisoners are medically examined by the healthcare team within 24 hours of arrival at HMP Stafford.

90. Waiting rooms for both main stream and vulnerable prisoners are now complete and in use. Both rooms have proved to be a much more attractive environment in which to wait for appointments. There continues to be a shortage of consulting rooms for visiting specialists and the issue is managed by using a strict rota system to lesser congestion in order to access the few available rooms.

(b) Dentistry

91. Waiting times for appointments are a recurrent source of complaint by prisoners. Following intervention, sessions have lately been increased, on a temporary basis, from two to three each week in order to reduce waiting lists. The average waiting time for appointments is eight weeks. A vigorous screening system has been introduced to identify those prisoners in most need. The Board finds the level of dentistry service unacceptable and would welcome the provision of three weekly sessions on a permanent basis.

(c) Chiropody and Optical Services

92. The Board is pleased to report that the level of provision gives no cause for concern and that waiting lists are relatively short.

(d) Mental Health

93. The issue of mental health care at HMP Stafford, in common with most prisons, continues to remain a major problem. Four nurses, qualified in the delivery of mental health care, are employed. The Board welcomes the introduction of Threshold Assessment Grid which is a form of risk assessment to identify, on referral, more urgent cases for treatment. Anxiety management and the In-Reach project continues. A new project 'Making Changes' has recently been initiated and will be monitored.

(e) Older Prisoners

94. HMP Stafford has a significant population of elderly prisoners. Resources and skill base of staff have been identified to help deliver appropriate health programmes. The Social Care Project is operating successfully and is now available to all prisoners aged 50 years and over who receive a comprehensive health check.

95. The Board welcomes the recent introduction of the Chronic Disease Self Management Programme, a pilot scheme aimed mainly at older prisoners. This is a community based project administered by volunteers who themselves have similar chronic diseases which may help prisoners better manage their condition.

(f) Healthcare Promotion (including drugs and alcohol)

96. Information regarding services offered by the healthcare team and how to access those services is displayed around the prison. The Board is pleased to report the continuation of a variety of campaigns to promote sexual health, smoking cessation, diabetes care (increasing in number), dental health, vaccinations and healthy eating. In November 2010 a Health Fare Day was organised and was well received. At this event Health Champions were recruited and subsequently trained to advise vulnerable prisoners how to obtain help to address medical problems. The Board hopes to see an extension of this project on main stream wings.

97. The Board is encouraged by the prison's extensive attempts not only to disrupt the supply of drugs into the establishment but also by attempts to lessen the effects of the drugs economy within the prison walls. Much of the bullying and threatening behaviour affecting prisoners is linked to drug debt and it is pleasing to note that the overall level of drug use in HMP Stafford remains the lowest in category C prisons in the West Midlands. The Intervention Drug Treatment Strategy is well used; indeed there is a waiting list. An IMB member attended a full staff briefing on the strategy given to staff in order to raise awareness of the issues. Prisoners continue to take advantage of the CARAT (Counsellor, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare) service which is well embedded in the treatment system. The demand for P-ASRO (Prison Against Substance Related Offending) is high especially on main stream wings. Attendees are prioritised by release dates, risks and need. P-ASRO is also delivering a new Alcohol Related Violence programme which is a ten week course designed to change prisoners' attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol. All prisoners continue to be screened in respect of alcohol dependency by healthcare on arrival at HMP Stafford and are given the appropriate information which it is hoped will be further developed.

SECTION 11

MISCELLANEOUS AREAS

(a) Management/staff

98. As previously reported there has been a continuing general improvement in staff morale over the past four to five years which continues despite the recent pressures resulting from reduced funding. The Board feels that, as a support to staff morale and indirectly for the benefit of prisoners, advantage could be gained by the wider dissemination of those parts of its Annual Report which identify and recognise good working practices and the excellent delivery of services. However, there remains some limited concerns about staff sickness levels which is being well managed by prison management. The Governor's rewards scheme which highlights members of staff who have introduced new projects, initiatives etc, including a new Staff Recognition Committee Annual Award, continues to benefit staff morale. A Board member sits, in an observer capacity, on the Performance Recognition Committee which meets monthly under the Chairmanship of the Governing Governor. Its role is to consider nominations from staff and prisoners commending those who have performed 'over and above' their official role: in appropriate cases they receive letters of thanks or money vouchers. In 2008 an annual award was created for the 'Employee of the Year' for which nominations throughout the prison are sought for staff who have not previously been recognised but who consistently perform their duties in an exemplary and unobtrusive way.

(b) Security

99. During the year, Board members again observed various serious incidents involving prisoners, including prisoners in the rafters and 'mock exercises' and continue to be impressed by the professionalism of prison staff in dealing with often delicate and dangerous situations. Some of these incidents involved members' attendance in the command suite when developments were explained, in detail, by the Duty Governor or his/her representative. Members also attend any de-briefing sessions which are essential and from which much of benefit can be learned, ready to be implemented, if necessary, when the next 'incident' occurs.

(c) Reception (including prisoners' induction programmes)

100. On arrival at the prison, mainstream and vulnerable prisoners continue to be placed in separate holding rooms. Staff attend to their tasks carefully and professionally, and in a cheerful and friendly manner, even on those occasions when there is considerable pressure caused by simultaneous arrival of several prisoners. The Board has welcomed the recently introduced structural improvements to the reception area which have helped to enhance prisoners' first reactions of HMP Stafford.

101. The distribution of prisoners' letters has, largely, been up to date whenever it was monitored by Board members: however, this continues not always to be the case

with parcels distribution although, following the Governor's direct intervention after representations from the Board, the number of complaints has reduced considerably.

102. The officers in the reception department remain ever helpful in assisting Board members in dealing with "lost property" applications from prisoners which continues to be on the decline.

103. All prisoner inductions are shortly to be held in a freestanding building in the centre of the prison which is also used for meetings and tuition purposes: this should help the Board in their monitoring obligations and help to meet the ongoing problems previously encountered because of the constant changes in the location and timings of the induction arrangements (see also paragraph 118 below).

(d) Kitchen

104. This again has been a demanding year for the kitchen which, although designed for 600 prisoners, caters for 740. Both staff and prisoners working in the kitchen are to be congratulated on their achievements. Special religious festivals were marked during the year including Christmas, Eid and Buddha's birthday. The kitchen continues to prepare most special food in-house coupled with experience in food presentation now that the kitchen caters for all buffets required in the prison.

105. The Board is aware that only by careful budgeting and commitment by the staff is the kitchen able to produce its quality, diversity and variety within such a small budget of £1.97 per day per prisoner. The Board remains concerned, however, that it may not be possible to sustain these standards during the coming year within the same budget at a time of rapidly rising food prices. Perhaps the only alternative, in the difficult financial climate, is a reduction in choice and more standardisation.

106. The Board continues to be impressed with the opportunities for training to NVQ level for up to 30 prisoners, seven days a week. Members have also been pleased to note that the kitchen received a 5 Star Environmental Health Award from the local authority and also an award from The Vegan Society. The training provision continues to be satisfactorily overseen, under the auspices of Manchester City College, by the Holiday Inn organisation who have agreed to consider employing prisoners after release provided they have obtained the necessary qualifications. This arrangement is to be warmly commended.

(e) Canteen

107. Some of the Board's criticisms of DHL/Booker's supply arrangements highlighted in the last Report (paragraphs 104 and 105) have been met although administrative improvements could be made to ensure the continued availability for prisoners of the widest possible areas of choice. A canteen prisoner representative from each wing meets bi-monthly with appropriate prison staff and DHL/Booker's representatives and these meetings are chaired by a member of the prison's senior management team.

(f) Workshops (including horticulture)

108. There are eight workshops, comprising ten units, offering employment opportunities including the production of motor vehicle accessories and light electrical assemblies, textiles/sewing/tailoring work and computer repairs where refurbished machines continue to be sent to local schools or schools in Africa. The Braille workshop continues to undertake contract work for the RNIB and also produces, inter alia, books in large print for various customers. The self contained laundry unit continues to be an extremely busy workshop. The painting and decorating workshop is accommodated on the first floor of a stand alone building. Reference to the waste management (reclamation) unit is made elsewhere in this report. All the workshops continue to work to full - or near full – capacity which the Board considers to be a creditable performance.

109. Although the Board appreciates that, for several reasons, the provision of repetitive and mundane component assembly work in the prison's workshops has its place, members continue to support the provision of more meaningful vocational training courses which equip and train prisoners in skills which are more relevant to outside employment and are more socially worthwhile. This strategy benefits the employment prospects of prisoners after release as part of the resettlement process (see also paragraph 119 below) and also helps, in some cases, to meet outside labour demands. The new vocational training centre (VTC), which opened in 2009, has certainly enhanced this strategy by providing a series of progressive training courses and, importantly, all with accreditation. These courses include carpentry, roofing, plastering, tiling, bricklaying and industrial cleaning. These necessary improvements were long overdue and their provision will undoubtedly enhance the prison's status as a competent training establishment. A barbering course leading to an NVQ Level 2 qualification has recently been introduced and an application is being made to the Skills Funding Agency for a fork lift truck training course once a suitable location can be found. However, notwithstanding current financial and space constraints, the Board encourages the creation of further progressive courses such as plumbing/joinery, and vehicle and electrical maintenance, for which there is considerable "outside" demand and therefore better employment opportunities for prisoners after release. The Board does not agree with the National Offender Management Service's assessment that such further provision would impact adversely on other areas of delivery.

110. The Board has witnessed dramatic and very welcome improvements to the prison's greenhouse and garden areas over the past four/five years which have provided NVQ Level 1 and 2 courses in horticulture for up to 20 main stream and vulnerable prisoners in the summer and a reduced number in the winter months. Unfortunately, in December 2010, prison management dispensed with the services of the external tutor from South Staffordshire College (formerly Rodbaston Horticultural College). The Board considered this decision to be unfortunate and somewhat out of step with the prison's otherwise progressive approach to ensure that courses are underscored by educational attainments/qualifications. It is hoped that the original

arrangements are re-introduced because, inter alia, of the indirect resettlement benefits for prisoners.

111. Last year several wooden planters, manufactured in the vocational training centre (VTC), were distributed around the prison to improve the visual appearances of what otherwise were regarded as somewhat oppressive surroundings. This development will shortly be further enhanced by the provision of large brick planters constructed by prisoners as part of their VTC accredited training courses, together with associated wooden seating facilities and thus give a greater appearance of permanence. These impressive visual improvements are often commented upon most favourably by visitors to the prison.

112. The 2010/11 winter months produced the most severe weather conditions for many years with temperatures falling to -16°. Whilst successful and creditable efforts were made by parties of prisoners to clear snow and ice from thoroughfares which helped to maintain regimes, many shrubs and other plants were lost.

113. The Board cannot over-emphasise the benefits to prisoners and the improvements to the general appearance of the prison in which the horticulture section has been an important cornerstone. The unit's success has meant that it has outgrown its propagating capacity and, notwithstanding current financial constraints, the Board would welcome the positive outcomes which would result from a relatively modest new investment to extend the greenhouse's current capacity.

(g) Waste Management (Reclamation) Unit

114. The Board continues to express its strong support for the excellent work and pioneering initiatives undertaken within the unit which employs 17 mainstream prisoners which will be reduced by one when new working arrangements are introduced in June 2011. The main area of training continues to be centred on waste management which is designed to assist prisoners, on release, to enter the vibrant waste disposal industry. All these projects offer prisoners purposeful activity and the opportunity to learn transferrable skills for later use.

115. About three quarters of the prison's waste is recycled including such items as surplus clothing, cutlery, bowls, towels, hard and soft plastics, footwear and glass which, in previous years, have been sent to landfill. New recycling initiatives have been introduced including processing surplus food waste, aluminium products, copper alloys, brass and rags. Significantly the general waste disposal contractor was changed in December 2010 and that, coupled with fresh contracts negotiated with new contractors, has increased income to the prison by 95% over 2009/10. The Board has been pleased to note that the contractor involved in acquiring surplus electrical components has agreed to consider employing prisoners after release or as part of the prison's Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) procedures. The assiduous use of a small adjoining, enclosed courtyard has, largely, resolved most of the storage capacity problems outlined in the last Report.

116. As previously reported the courses attracting NVQ qualifications were suspended because of the departure of the qualified trainer as part of the change over of provider from Stoke College to Manchester College. The Board understands that the previous funding allocation has not yet been reintroduced which it is felt continues to disadvantage prisoners wishing to achieve appropriate NVQ qualifications: this also runs contrary to the prison's general educational theme affecting other parts of the prison with respect to the obtaining of qualifications.

117. The reduction in the number of Board members has meant that it has not been possible, this year, to observe the quarterly Environmental and Energy Committee meetings which continue to involve representatives of many parts of the prison and to which prisoners make substantial contributions towards the prison's environmental and energy performance. The widespread support in the prison for the work of the unit, including prisoners' contributions, and the excellent results which it continues to achieve are welcomed. The Board understands that extra emphasis is now being given to exchanging views and areas of best practice in relation to waste reclamation/management with other prisons in the West Midlands. This arrangement should prove to be a fruitful exercise and the Board will monitor outcomes.

(h) Prisoners' Induction Programme

118. As indicated in the last Annual Report (paragraph 115) members encountered difficulties in 2009/10 in fulfilling their monitoring responsibilities in relation to the prisoners' induction programme mainly because of frequent changes in timing and location of induction board meetings. The consequential discussions with the Governor about this problem has improved the situation as of late which has enabled the Board to improve their monitoring obligation to prisoners which members consider to be important. The current arrangements (see also paragraph 103 above) will be reviewed to ensure that the recent improvements in the induction procedures are maintained and, where necessary, are enhanced to the benefit of prisoners.

(i) Resettlement

119. An effective resettlement strategy, like security, is one of the most important responsibilities not only for prison management but also for an ever increasing proportion of staff having regard to its vital importance to prisoners on release. The seven resettlement pathways, each of which is the responsibility of, and is led by, a departmental manager are: (a) accommodation; (b) education/training and employment; (c) mental and physical health; (d) drugs and alcohol; (e) finance/benefits/debts; (f) children/families of offenders; and (g) attitudes/thinking and behaviour.

120. An important development this year has been the appointment of a manager specifically tasked to oversee and co-ordinate the prison's resettlement activities and to ensure that effective and timely progress is maintained to achieve the necessary outcomes: his role is also to ensure that there is no duplication or overlapping in the pathways strategies.

121. Resettlement meetings, upon which the Board has observer representation, are attended by all the pathway leaders and are now being held more regularly than hitherto. This increased level of co-ordination is, in the Board's view, a positive development and members feel more optimistic for the future in relation to this important area of activity.

122. Progress on the pathways dealing with (b), (c) and (d) above is referred to elsewhere in the Annual Report: the remaining pathways are mentioned overpage:-

- (i) accommodation – much progress has been made including successful liaison with several external housing agencies;
- (ii) finance, benefits and debt – a Money Service Advice Line for prisoners began at the end of 2010 together with liaison work to enable prisoners to open accounts with three of the major high street banks;
- (iii) children and families of offenders – staff sickness has prevented the hoped for progress in this area. Although funding has finished for the Building Stronger Families scheme, more is being actively and creatively pursued. The Board is aware that there have been problems with crèche staffing and prisoners' visits (see also paragraphs 138 and 141 below) but respects the prison's honesty about these difficulties; new volunteers for crèche supervision and a new system for organised visits are recognised as urgent needs which the Board is confident will be addressed;
- (iv) attitudes/thinking and behaviour – positive progress has been achieved in these areas and all programmes are operating well.

123. On a general issue, the Board recognises that it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of resettlement given the recent increase in prisoners serving less than four months whom HMP Stafford is obliged to take even though little effective work can be completed, or even started, in such a short time. Those prisoners serving over four months detention will soon be able to access a new resettlement drop-in facility in the visits area which staff are developing; another interesting initiative is the virtual campus in the Education block which offers online career/support information. Resettlement of prisoners after discharge is also challenging in that sentences of over 12 months are Probation's responsibility and prisoners serving a period of less than 12 months have no supervision at all post release. On a much more positive note, however, the key performance figures for most of this year have been above target. It is hoped that the proposed creation of an additional, relatively small category D unit at the prison will be a significant boost to the resettlement programme. The drop-in facility, the virtual campus and the proposed new category D facility are all really positive initiatives which the Board looks forward to monitoring.

124. In relation to the provision of probation services within the prison, and since the last Annual Report, budget restrictions have dictated that there can only be two offender supervisors at HMP Stafford whose duties have had to be restricted to IPPs (prisoners with indeterminate length sentence for public protection) only; this clearly

militates against the implementation of a full resettlement programme. The prioritisation of the work in relation to IPPs in terms of courses does at least improve their chances of achieving category D status but does little to help the other prisoners. The Board is concerned that, firstly, unless vulnerable prisoners admit a (sexual) offence they are not able to progress in the system and, secondly, that funding cannot stretch to enough sex offender treatment programme places even for IPP prisoners.

(j) Death in custody

125. There has been one death in custody, from natural causes, which occurred in hospital. The circumstances were explained fully to the Board including the prompt notification of the event.

(k) The Chaplaincy

126. The Chaplaincy team is well respected by prisoners and staff for its pastoral as well as spiritual care. There are chaplains for 13 faith and belief groups, and services or meetings take place for nine of these.

127. All prisoners are seen by a chaplain within 24 hours of arrival and are given a multi faith leaflet explaining the work of the chaplains and informing them that 'we are here to help'.

128. The chaplains, all of whom, except the co-ordinating chaplain, are either part time or sessional, display exemplary team work in the way in which they support each other and the prisoners, not merely those of their own faith. On occasion, a newly bereaved prisoner was taken to the Christian Chapel by a Muslim Imam to light a candle; also, various chaplains have set up a rota to assist a Jewish prisoner in the lighting of the daily Hanukah candle.

129. Attendance at services and faith groups is generally good. The Sunday (Christian) service is attended by between 45 and 60 prisoners, both main stream and VP, and about 64 prisoners in two separate groups attend Muslim Friday Prayers led by the two Imams. Prisoners have previously been allowed to attend services of other faith groups as well as their own but this practice is shortly to cease.

130. The main faith festivals were celebrated throughout the year. Each faith group was able to nominate two dates for special food. The chaplaincy is always appreciative of the co-operation and willingness of the Head of Catering to supply appropriate food on these occasions out of his very limited budget.

131. The prison visitors scheme continues to be ably organised by the voluntary chaplaincy assistant who trains and supports them: she has been awarded the MBE in recognition of her services to the prison. Weekend visiting, which was recently introduced, has worked well though not all prison visitors can manage this time. Problems have occurred on the VP wings when rooms have not been available and some prison visitors have had to leave without seeing their prisoner.

132. All faith groups have both teaching and prayer; for some the teaching is ongoing but for others specific short courses are offered, eg bible study and living with loss. The faith awareness course for prison staff, which will become mandatory,

has had only a small take-up but the chaplains are planning to change its delivery and re-work the national format to make it more acceptable.

133. In addition to the charity event in October 2010 in support of the Samaritans when £200 was raised (see also paragraph 78 above) a collection at the Christmas Carol Service raised £139 for Shelter.

134. The reduction in its budget of over 20% has had a great impact on the chaplaincy. Many of the chaplains have had a reduction in hours, and bank holidays are now covered by the generosity of the voluntary chaplaincy assistant. The chaplaincy feels that it is not able to offer the level of support to prisoners that it would wish, or to offer courses that would help with prisoners' rehabilitation. The Board is concerned that any further reduction would even more seriously impact on pastoral care and the very important contribution that the chaplaincy makes to the resettlement of prisoners. The Board considers the chaplaincy to be a huge asset to the prison.

(l) Arrangement for Visitors

135. The visitors' centre occupies the ground floor of a free standing building on Gaol Road, opposite the prison; it is staffed by the Halow Trust supported by local volunteers. The visits room tea bar, within the prison, continues to be operated by the Friends of Stafford Prison (formerly by the WRVS) who serve drinks and snacks. The Board continues to applaud all these voluntary efforts particularly since up to 150 visitors use these facilities each visiting day.

136. The Board welcomes the recent improvements made in the visiting arrangements. When booking, visitors are now issued with a number and allocated a short period of time when they will be dealt with at the visitors' centre. This has meant that there are no longer queues of people waiting outside, sometimes for as long as three hours, for the building to open. Staff are able to process the visitors more effectively and send them over in small groups to the prison, where the prisoners are already waiting in the visits hall. This results in prisoners and their visitors having well over the statutory one hour session together.

137. However, visitors still express considerable dissatisfaction with the telephone booking system. Callers say that they routinely make many attempts before they are able to speak to the bookings clerk. In addition the available times are limited to one period in the morning and one in the afternoon on weekdays. This disadvantages callers in full-time work who may only be able to make calls before work, during the lunch time or late afternoon. One mother was so frustrated and angry that she wrote to the prison newspaper 'Inside Times' in February 2011 and, to his credit, the Governor responded to her personally. There have been constant staffing changes with the booking arrangements but, hopefully, the overall situation will improve in October 2011 when the booking system will be put on a regional level.

138. The Board remains concerned about the lack of adequate supervision for the play area in the visits hall, particularly during main stream visits when there are likely to be more small children there.

139. The visits centre, though sometimes feeling rather cramped, offers refreshments and a comprehensive display of relevant information. The manager leads a very helpful, friendly and efficient team of paid and volunteer workers and in turn is well supported by prison officers. Visitors speak appreciatively of their reception both at the centre and within the prison.

(m) Volunteers' Forum

140. The many volunteers who are involved with HMP Stafford make a small but none the less significant contribution to prison life which continues to be recognised and valued by prison management. Previously there have been two or three 'volunteers' meetings a year which were always well attended and included members of the local Bereavement and Loss Counselling Service, the ladies who staff the tea bar in the visits hall, official prison visitors, staff from the visitors' centre and the chaplaincy. Occasionally an appropriate Governor would also attend as would a Board member in an observer capacity. The volunteers were able to hear topical news of interest within the prison and receive copies of the prisoners' monthly newsletter. Each meeting would also contain a training element. Importantly volunteers have the chance to raise and discuss issues and concerns for them and the prison, which always results in a meaningful, constructive two way flow of information.

141. Unfortunately, however, because of the long term absence through illness of the Governor responsible for this area of activity, only one meeting was held in 2010/11. In the event that meeting was quite successful when the main topic of discussion was the prison's resettlement programme. Other issues included concerns about the lack of supervision of the crèche in the visits hall (see also paragraph 138 above) and the possibility of engaging the help of an outside voluntary organisation to assist with measures to counter the problems of alcohol abuse by some prisoners.

142. It is understood that measures are in hand to return to the earlier frequency of 'volunteers' meetings which the Board strongly welcomes.

(n) Physical Education

143. The facilities in the extended sports hall continue to be used throughout the working week and also during evening association and at weekends, with Christmas Day being the only exception. The enthusiastic staff work on a shift pattern to support an average of 75 prisoners during each working day. This year a Get Fit for Life course has been organised which awards 15 credits at Level 2, a Community Sports Leader course awarding nine credits at Level 2 and an Understanding Substance Abuse programme which addresses issues associated with alcohol, social and recreational drugs, hard drugs and performance enhancing drugs. Those prisoners

successfully completing this latter course will receive six credits at Level 2 after 30 hours of guided learning: the Board applauds the introduction of this course.

144. Recreational PE is very popular with a large proportion of prisoners, who attend the sessions in separate main stream and vulnerable prisoner groups. Attendance always exceeds its 85% target. The lists for recreational PE are controlled by wing staff but there are still concerns among prisoners about how these allocations are operated. One particular issue is that it is thought to be unfair that prisoners who have spent all or part of their working day using the PE facilities are still allowed to attend in the evenings even though the evening sessions are oversubscribed. It has been suggested by some prisoners that priority for evening sessions should be given to those prisoners who do not have day time association: *prime facie* the Board considers there to be the some merit in this suggestion.

145. The Board hopes that, in the coming year, the PE staff will monitor and, if needs be, review the attendance lists for recreational PE to ensure that all prisoners have fair access, and to encourage older prisoners, of whom HMP Stafford has many, to attend and fully participate in the facilities offered.

(o) Premises

146. As previously reported prison management continues to give a high priority to ensuring that the prison and its surroundings remain clean and tidy and free from unwanted litter. The progressive use of some of the produce of the greenhouse, eg shrubs, plants, hanging flower baskets, etc over the past three years is commendable: this has enhanced the general appearance of the prison to a considerable degree. This development has been added to this year by the provision of wooden planters soon to be further enhanced by brick built planters together with added seating facilities all of which will have been constructed by prisoners and which will give an appearance of permanence (see also paragraph 111 above).

147. The foregoing general improvements to the physical appearance of the prison continue to play an important part, in the Board's view, in lifting the atmosphere within the prison and enhancing what the Board has previously described as a continuing "air of optimism". Considering the nature of the establishment, it seems now to be a happier place than in previous years. The results achieved so far have been very impressive.

(p) Prisoners' pay/remuneration

148. The prison's level of employment remains at almost 100% which is a most creditable performance. However because of the financial cutbacks this year and last, prison management have been unable to increase the pay budget for prisoners. Although not happy with the situation, the prisoners have seemed to accept the position with some equanimity.

(q) Incentives and earned privileges

149. As reported in the last Report (paragraph 157) the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) policy document was reviewed early in 2009 when the main changes related to those prisoners on basic regime who, in certain circumstances, would be entitled to a second visit per month. A review of their basic IEP status now takes place every 14 days after an initial seven day review. Enhanced prisoners are now expected to gain at least one “over-achieved” in the period between reviews, as failure to do so could result in their downgrading to the standard IEP level.

150. As also previously reported, the Board was not able to monitor IEP review boards as it would have wished because they were often either cancelled at short notice or did not always take place at a specified time on the allotted day. This situation was exacerbated when the decision was taken to hold IEP review Boards on all wings at weekends at a time that each wing found convenient. Whilst the reasons for this revised arrangement were appreciated, it has meant that it has continued to be almost impossible for members to undertake meaningful monitoring of this process which is of importance to prisoners. Members would welcome the reintroduction of the weekday review Boards.

(r) The Prisoners’ Council

151. The Prisoners’ Council, upon which the Board has observer representation, fulfils an important role in that it is an effective forum for prisoners’ representations, across a wide range of issues, to be discussed openly and directly with appropriate Governors and senior prison staff. However, during the reporting year, four of the scheduled monthly meetings did not take place although they were not actually cancelled. Those meetings that did take place were chaired by several different Governors. This lack of continuity meant that, frequently, points for action were not followed through. Understandably, there was a perception among the prisoner representatives, who are now elected by formal ballot rather than by nomination, that they and the meetings were not being taken sufficiently seriously by prison management, a view which was generally shared by the Board.

152. The Governor intervened personally and attended the April 2011 meeting with 12 senior management team (SMT) members and a clerk to take minutes. A clerk has been provided for subsequent meetings and it is the intention that the SMT should be present every three months in order to demonstrate the prison management’s view of the importance of the meetings and to answer any queries. The Board very much hopes that this impetus will be maintained in the coming year and, because of this and the significance of this particular forum for debate, the issue will be closely monitored.

(s) Foreign National Prisoners

153. The Board, which continues to receive monthly reports on the numbers and status of foreign national prisoners (FNPs) held at HMP Stafford, has noted an average reduction in these numbers over the previous reporting period. Although not within the power of prison management, the Board continues to take the view that, in those cases where it is appropriate, FNPs should be transferred to a detention/immigration centre upon completion of their sentence more rapidly than at present. Additionally the Board would like to see a reduction in the length of time sentence expired prisoners are retained at HMP Stafford under an IS91 authority.

154. The role of the Foreign Nationals Officer is now well embedded and half day meetings (mornings for main stream and afternoons for VPs) take place on a regular basis to support prisoners' needs and to provide appropriate information. These meetings appear to be quite productive and are welcomed by the Board.

155. The original intention was to have quarterly meetings for FNPs, chaired by a Governor, upon which the Board has observer representation. During the reporting period only one such meeting was held which the Board felt was disappointing. However the Board is satisfied that any issues affecting FNPs can, and are, raised at the monthly Prisoner Council meetings which is chaired by a Governor and at which FNPs are represented. However the Board feels it is more appropriate, and in the interests of FNPs, that the arrangement for quarterly meetings specifically designed to deal with FNP's issues should be the norm.

SECTION 12

CONCLUSION

156. The Board again wishes to commend the good working relationship it has with Governor Small, his management team and prison officers/civilian employees with whom members come into contact; they are highly motivated, endlessly helpful and also open and constructive in their responses which members do appreciate. Members are indebted to their Clerk for his excellent support and also to his immediate office colleagues who willingly assist members in his absence. The Board continues to acknowledge the professionalism, patience and dedication of prison officers who often perform their work in difficult and trying circumstances.

157. The Board wishes to re-emphasise its earlier statements applauding the positive effects which Governor Small's new and enterprising initiatives have produced which have included enhanced service provision in many areas and the continued general improvement in staff morale. The Board concurs in the latest view of HM Inspector of Prisons that HMP Stafford "is an improved and improving prison". The Board also welcomes the positive effect created by the low level of occupancy of the segregation unit coupled with the continued improvement in the appearance of the prison's surroundings within the perimeter walls; all these issues are constantly commented upon favourably by members. The Board is also pleased to acknowledge that the previously reported increased air of optimism in the prison continues, notwithstanding the usual stresses and strains encountered almost daily within the prison and, not the least, the growing effects which reductions in expenditure are having.

158. The Board remains particularly impressed, following the opening of the new vocational training centre in July 2009, at the increased range of purposeful vocational training initiatives now provided, which also attract accreditation. This long overdue and necessary development, for which the Board had been pressing for many years will, because of its comprehensive nature, undoubtedly enhance the prison's status as a competent training establishment. The past investment in time and energy is now paying positive results.

159. Notwithstanding recent improvements, the Board continues to remain unhappy at the insufficient level of dentistry provision in the prison. The Board is also aware of some of the effects which the expenditure restrictions are having including the non-replacement of retired/transferred staff, the loss of external tutors (horticulture and waste reclamation), the obvious resultant additional pressures on some staff and a noticeable reduction in the Chaplaincy budget. The Board does not underestimate the prison's problems in operating on a reduced budget and Governor Small is to be congratulated on his overall handling of the situation. It would seem that increased levels of co-operation and partnership between prisons in the West Midlands is a possible way of achieving savings with improved economies of scale in service provision. Conversely the Board welcomes the impending introduction, as part of the improving resettlement programme, of a more realistic approach to prisoners' future

employment prospects. One way in which this is being achieved, in a preliminary way, is the introduction of a 9am to 5pm working day for up to 50 prisoners undertaking, separately, painting/decorating, horticulture and waste reclamation duties within the prison. They will have a short break in mid morning and mid afternoon with lunch being provided, in a separate building, before prisoners return to their cells at tea time. This welcome and innovative strategy is designed to introduce these prisoners to conditions somewhat akin to a standard working day to be encountered after release.

160. Against the background of a reduced active Board membership (50%) for much of the year I wish to pay particular tribute to my colleagues for their hard work, dedication and commitment to ensure, as far as they are able, that prisoners at HMP Stafford continue to be dealt with in a decent and humane way.

Lorna Jones
Chair

October 2011

*This report was approved by the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Stafford on 3 October 2011
This report to be sent to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice on 7 October 2011.*