



HMP STANDFORD HILL

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

YEAR ENDING 30 APRIL 2011

**HMP STANDFORD HILL
CHURCH ROAD
EASTCHURCH
SHEPPEY
KENT ME12 4AA**

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

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

The Board is specifically charged to:-

- (1) Satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
- (2) Inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- (3) Report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period from 1st May 2010 to 30th April 2011.

HMP Stanford Hill is an open D category establishment for low risk male offenders on the Isle of Sheppey. Together with HMP Swaleside and HMP Elmley it forms the Sheppey cluster under a single management team.

The prison holds 464 prisoners and was opened in 1950. It is a resettlement prison but it would appear to the Board that more prisoners could be gainfully employed.

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ISSUES REQUIRING A RESPONSE

“A period of management stability has wrought considerable and beneficial changes to HMP Stanford Hill. Of the areas requiring a response last year: property, though not perfect, is improving; the Parole Board have attended regularly and there is a possibility of a few lifers being released on tariff or not long after.

In the areas not requiring a response: OMU’s surgeries have proved a great success and eased the anxieties of prisoners; cleanliness has improved dramatically; the wings look clean and attractive; peer worker industry is now acknowledged and rewarded. In our judgement HMP Stanford Hill remains a generally safe, respectful and purposeful place”.

These paragraphs were written before our end of April deadline in anticipation when the Board felt that, in the last nine months, they had had the best experience at Stanford Hill for many years. The first sentence has an extremely hollow ring; the number one Governor has been removed after nine months in office, as has the Deputy Governor. With the possible exception of the newly appointed Chaplain, not one member of the Senior Management Team remains in post; inevitably this causes major disruption and makes the uniform staff feel as they have been disregarded and treated with contempt. It cannot be emphasised too strongly the amount of distress and upheaval caused by these moves.

The Board are perfectly aware of why the changes were thought necessary – the political adherence to the “Cluster” creates problems. As the Cluster has disappeared and a Group emerged, perhaps co-operation and common sense can now prevail. The 90 days “let’s see if the system works” would appear to this Board to add to the dysfunctionality of constant disruption.

THEREFORE

The Board would like it to be firmly noted that HMP Stanford Hill has now had SEVEN governors in FIVE years, the last two managing one year three months between them. The people who make these decisions should be more aware of the disruption and distress these constant changes create in staff and prisoners.

The Board wishes everyone concerned to be very aware that every decision taken affects people and their lives and should not be taken in what would appear to be a light manner – who makes these extraordinary decisions?

DIVERSITY

Again, in the Board's view, Diversity is well run and monitored in the prison. Bi-monthly, usually well attended meetings are held. Complaints are investigated and dealt with appropriately. Disabilities assessed and assisted.

There has been much discussion over the last year over joining diversity in the three prisons together; this has taken time and energy to return to square one. The ultimate decision, we are told, being taken at the highest level.

HEALTHCARE

The staff in Healthcare continue to provide a good and efficient service to prisoners and are expanding their activities within the service.

Problems concerning prisoners receiving an appointment with either the Doctor or Dentist have been addressed and the system operates on a first-come, first-served basis. However, should a prisoner require to see either the doctor or Dentist and has not received an appointment, he is then first of all seen by the triage nurse who assesses the concerns and then, if necessary refers the prisoner to either the Doctor or Dentist for attention as necessary.

Staff at the centre are vigilant as prisoners, on occasions, do try and receive unnecessary treatment or drugs or referrals. The Board completed a report for SE Healthcare.

EDUCATION

Education enjoys independence within the Sheppey Cluster and benefits from employing an OLASS Manager, accompanied by a full time Deputy, nine contracted lecturers, with twelve sessional staff, two representatives from Tribal and a full time Administrator/Co-ordinator. The practice of testing all prisoners on induction has been continued, with 73 presently enrolled students with a 90% attendance rate.

CGLI entry Level 1 and OCR Level II Literacy are provided for basic education courses supported by AQA Entry Level 1 and OCR Levels 1 and II courses in Numeracy. Vocational courses in Carpentry (CGLI) and BICS Cleaning as well as ICT (ITQ and OCR and II) are also available. Questionnaires revealed that 'one-to-one' tuition is preferred by a substantial number of educationally disadvantaged prisoners; they are able to access this via 'Outreach' which is now provided by sessional tutors (formerly contracted full time). Indeed, Manchester College has increased the number of courses provided by sessional tuition and, changes to contract and conditions of service have resulted in disquiet and low morale amongst a substantial number of lecturers.

A purpose-built Education block has alleviated many of the difficulties encountered in previous years though some difficulties remain – lack of air conditioning creates poor working conditions for ICT whilst delays in introducing BIS 'Virtual Campus' have generated problems for prisoners who enter Stanford Hill having previously embarked upon OU courses in more secure establishments.

ESOL courses have been reduced to mornings only and evening courses in Art and Crafts and introductory Spanish (once very popular), have been discontinued. A need for more vocational courses has been identified, but financial constraints mitigate against their introduction.

FOREIGN NATIONALS

The total number of Foreign National prisoners has declined throughout the year. At the last count, 24 such prisoners, comprised of 19 different nationalities, could be identified. An inverse relationship may be said to exist at Stanford Hill where the reduction in the number of Foreign Nationals has been accompanied by improvements in the care of these prisoners. Focus groups have been re-established and successful visits by the UKBA helped raise and resolve a number of issues causing concern, though problems centering on visits and home visits still remain.

SAFER CUSTODY

For the most part Standford Hill continues to offer a safe environment in which to be imprisoned but is constantly having to grapple with the problems which arise because of the change in the nature of the offender's accommodation in this 'open prison' coupled with the alterations and amendments to staffing.

In order to fulfil its role in aiding resettlement, the prison provides the opportunity for a fair proportion of prisoners to be employed in the Working Out Scheme and many offenders benefit from Release on Temporary Licence. This allows pressure to be placed on prisoners returning to the prison to transgress and, given the low numbers of staff on duty during the evenings, the potential for bullying and its consequences are difficult to detect. Fortunately, such potential difficulties are ameliorated by the healthy relationship enjoyed by officers and prisoners and, where incidents of bullying and duress come to light, they are tackled quickly and efficiently, although this inevitably means that offenders are transferred back to the closed estate.

Intelligence and monitoring, with occasional evening patrols, have so far proved sufficient to constrain any untoward activity throughout those times when the prison is lightly staffed during the evenings and at Bank holidays. There has to be some concern that any further reduction in staffing or change to the nature and demeanour of the inmates transferred into this prison could seriously impact upon the wellbeing of those detained.

SECURITY

Having had a period of good stability the leadership has now changed. The staffing levels at Standford Hill are inadequate for routine security checks though information-led checks have appeared successful.

LIFE SENTENCE PRISONERS

The number of life sentence prisoners has risen steadily throughout the year (now approaching 50) and with a significant waiting list.

The excellent team of supervising lifer officers has fortunately remained stable throughout the year, with continuing strong support from the prison probation officer and the lifer clerks.

This team has therefore managed to weather the continuing and constant changes of senior management which regrettably now are a permanent feature of Stanford Hill.

The Parole Board hearings have shown a marked improvement and most hearings are now nearer their due dates. Provided this continues to improve, there is a reasonable chance of some prisoners being released on time.

It remains disappointing that lifers arriving at Stanford Hill have frequently been kept waiting many months after their "open conditions" recommendation. This gives our lifer team an unnecessarily truncated period before the lifer's next review. This can only get worse and the waiting list should be a cause of great concern to Lifer Management. The waiting list presently stands at February 2012. This must clearly be addressed; the provision of additional clerical assistance would create an immediate improvement. The prisoner applying today may well have to wait until February 2012 before being transferred to HMP Stanford Hill.

The practice of sending category D prisoners to Stanford Hill in handcuffs, and in either a prison van or a taxi, even from HMP Swaleside about 200 yards way, seems quite an unnecessary waste of public money.

PROBATION

The workload in this department steadily increases.

The increase in the lifer population (whilst welcome) inevitably requires many additional reports, and Probation continue to carry out the Public Protection Screening for all prisoners arriving at Stanford Hill.

In spite of this heavy workload, our single Probation Officer makes an outstanding contribution at Stanford Hill, for which the lifers in particular are very grateful.

CHAPLAINCY

The Chaplaincy – multi faith support – is now co-ordinated by a full time Free Church Chaplain. This relatively recent appointment was necessary when the previous co-ordinating and Church of England Chaplain very regrettably resigned mid-way through the reporting year. The resignation from this important role created some issues of chaplaincy cover and response to prisoner spiritual and personal issues. Fortunately, preceding the co-ordinator's resignation agreement had been reached for the Chaplaincy Team at Swaleside to provide cover as and when required. This cover was necessarily called upon and all members of the Swaleside Chaplaincy Team spent time at Standford Hill, covering some Sunday services and Mondays. The Board was pleased to see that the then number one Governor took swift action to manage the vacancy and the new Co-ordinating Chaplain was appointed in February and took up the full time position in March 2011.

In addition to the co-ordinating Chaplain, the Multi Faith Team is made up of:

- 1 Catholic – who provides 15 hours support over four days each week;
- 1 Imam – who, since the appointment of the Co-ordinating Chaplain, provides support for two days each week;
- 1 Ecumenical (currently Church of England) provides one day per week through the sessional arrangement;
- 1 Church of England – who should provide three days but is currently a vacancy.

In addition, regular weekly sessions are provided by Hindu, Sikh and Jehovah Witness representatives. Buddhist and Jewish sessions are made available as and when required.

The Multi Faith Team provides services, regular prayer times and discussion groups. The Imam runs the Tarbyah study course, a three month course for Muslims on their faith which seeks to teach the faith and presents Muslims beliefs which reflect a moderate understanding of the faith. The team acts as a very important central point for the receipt and action of prisoner welfare issues and this element takes up considerable resource.

The team ensures that each wing is visited every day, and is clearly visible in the prison, easily available and very approachable. All issues, regardless of faith, can and are dealt with by any member of the Faith Team.

OFFENDER MANAGEMENT UNIT (OMU)

OMU is a key department in the management of prisoners. OMU input is required in the movement of all offenders in and out of the prison whether through initial reception, release, the provision of all types of temporary release licences or early release on tag (Home Detention Curfew). In a Category D resettlement establishment these activities represent a very high workload. It is paramount that such activity is scheduled efficiently to ensure there is minimal aggravation and cause given for resentment. In the case of release on HDC to enable release as soon as practically possible to free up spaces for incoming prisoners. In the current environment, OMU works to seek to achieve its targets.

In the past year OMU has seen fewer changes in staff at management level and which has led to improved continuity of work activity control. During the year, regular twice-weekly surgeries have been introduced to enable prisoners to discuss and receive answers to a variety of issues and the directness of this approach is reaping dividends. As a direct result of the introduction of this and other good practices communication with prisoners, prisoner issue resolution and timeliness of release on tag has improved considerably.

However, the overly high proportion of part time staff can, and occasionally does, lead to delays in processing of work and follow up activity. We are lead to believe the high level of part time staff will be addressed during the forthcoming year.

PERSONAL OFFICER SCHEME

It is unrealistic to expect a personal officer scheme to work fully in this prison with the current staffing levels.

GROUNDS

Building works have now stopped and there is a chance to render the grounds immaculate – the personnel are there. To date, the chance has not been taken.

The spring bedding borders looked beautiful but the rabbits remain an ever increasing problem.

VISITS

This area continues to operate well and is light, open and comfortable. The uniformed staff are sympathetic to the atmosphere of the area, eg prisoners and family meeting etc and allow such meetings to be conducted in a flexible way. The visits area is, of course, an area vulnerable to the exchange of drugs etc between prisoners and visitors and uniformed staff are vigilant to this.

FOOD – CATERING

Fewer complaints than last year but a change of staff in March and therefore a bedding-in period. Catering meetings are held regularly but not well attended by prisoners, which is possibly a good sign.

The Board feel the food is generally of a good to high standard; it is tasted by a Board member and also by the wing Senior Officer. Potatoes either chipped or not appear to be a permanent bone of contention.

LIBRARY

The Library is well stocked and still has daily newspapers despite threats to stop them. A good helpful team of peer support workers always willing to help.

RECYCLING

Recycling has had its fair share of problems this year with cancelled contracts. There is plenty of work which is well paid, therefore creating an unfair job market. This encourages prisoners to stay in the prison instead of seeking work outside.

INCIDENTS

There have been two incidents over the last year, the first a bomb scare phone call. As it was in the middle of the Board meeting we were well represented. Eventually, after a long and exhausting time for staff and prisoners it was decided it was a hoax.

The second a bullet case found near Recycling was handled in an efficient low key way and wound up quickly; again, the Board were in attendance.

RECEPTION

A very busy area at the beginning and end of the day, dealing with roughly 90 people a day (Working Out, hospital, newcomers etc). Still not a very pleasant area in which to work. The staff deal appropriately and effectively with all comers ably assisted by peer workers.

THE GATE

Generally, and with the usual staff, people are treated efficiently and courteously; on occasion some staff have appeared to the Board to be not very smart or efficient.

The area still appears dingy and unattractive.

FIRE AUDIT

It has been encouraging, at long last, to learn that a regular audit of fire safety is being carried out. This activity is long overdue and whilst there are still some areas to be addressed, in general there appears to be some improvement in fire safety standards made. Money needs to be made available to replace long worn out safety equipment (fire safety doors) but for the moment staff continue to provide a 'make do and mend' policy which is not of course satisfactory. Those responsible for ensuring finance is made available to replace such equipment must address the issue with urgency.

GYMNASIUM

Work continues to provide both Physical Education and Recreation. The Gymnasium is well used and busy throughout the day.

The public visit once weekly to use the swimming pool as a therapy following various medical conditions.

The Gymnasium hosted a successful health day in March, which was well supported by various agencies. It provided a good platform for healthy living advice.

It was possible to receive a health 'MOT' and both staff and prisoners took advantage of this. It was a well organised function.

The Gymnasium staff intend to provide a 'potted sports' for children attending the next family day.

STAFF

Uniformed staff, in the Board's experience, are helpful and co-operative with prisoners while maintaining discipline. They have had to live through many changes of management but have kept the show on the road.

Most staff look very smart but some could pay a little more attention to detail especially when on public view.

ADJUDICATIONS

Adjudications are attended on a regular basis.

In the view of the Board, some of the charges appear fairly trivial and should have been dealt with at wing level.

The Independent Adjudicator attends regularly and all matters appear to be dealt with fairly.

CARATS

Carats continue to provide a very useful service to prisoners who, voluntarily wish to be guided away from any drink/drugs problem that they may have.

Carats staff of three advise, should any prisoner so wish, on harm minimisation and create self-awareness of any drink/drug problem a prisoner may have. A drop-in service for prisoners is operated and Carats staff may see up to 50 prisoners per. week who voluntarily attend for advice. Some prisoners, who undergo VDT/MDT and fail are referred to Carats for further advice, should they so wish. Regular group therapy sessions are held which are attended, voluntarily, by those prisoners who wish to help themselves overcome any drink/drug problem they may have.

Upon release, prisoners , are provided with much self help information and are directed to relevant outside agencies for further help should they so wish to contact same for guidance.

WORKING OUT SCHEME

Statistics are still hard to come by; it would appear to the Board that as a resettlement prison far more people should be working out in the community as a step towards their release.

Currently 87 offenders are actively engaged in the Working out Scheme (WOS) of which only 13 are in paid employment – the remainder are engaged in community work or education. However the WOS Section works with a further (approximately) 70 individuals in the processes leading up to active employment, community work or education. The (WOS) department believe their remit is to work with a maximum of 100 offenders at any one time and so the current number of around 160 appears to be in excess of expectations. This leads to questions of effectiveness and efficiencies of the service provided.

The number in paid employment shows a reduction in the position as at the close of the previous year which is believed to be due to a number of factors which include:

- a general decline in the job market
- location of the prison in an area of deprivation
- poor transport links from and around the Island
- delays checking prospective employers by agencies external to the prison regime leading to the withdrawal of job offers
- inadequate employee liability insurance held by prospective employers which excludes them from the scheme

THE WORK OF THE IMB

A Board member visits the prison almost every day. An evening surgery is held on occasion to 'catch' those who wish to see the Board but are out at work during the day. Church services are attended and a Christmas Day visit is made.

The Board consists of eight members – we have kept well to our budget possibly because we are short of Board members and hope to recruit two more shortly.

Inductions are held every week and a member attends. IMB boxes are emptied virtually daily and queries dealt with. Members are seen around the prison and available for discussions.

We would consider that we have a good working relationship with the Governor and Senior Management and are now getting to know the most recent new team.

The Chairman has quarterly meetings with the Chief Executive of the Cluster – now apparently a Group.

We are most efficiently supported by our IMB clerk who has been with us for a whole year and more; wonderfully unusual!

STATISTICS

BOARD STATISTICS	
Recommended complement of Board Members	10
Number of Members at start of reporting period	9
Number of Members at end of reporting period	8
Number of new Members joining within the reporting period	1
Number of Members leaving within the reporting period.	2
Total number of visits to the prison	371
Total number of applications received	311
Total number of segregation reviews held	N/app
Total number of segregation reviews attended	N/app

The following table contains the statistics of applications to the Board

Code	Subject	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
A	Accommodation	3	7	12	5	5
B	Adjudications	16	12	22	11	12
C	Diversity related	5	7	2	2	6
D	Education/employment/training	3	28	23	16	21
E	Family/visits ROTL/home leave/town visits	14	6 34	5	5 14	9
F	Food	5	13	6	8	4
G	Health related	16	17	29	8	21
H1	Property/money Stanford Hill		23	19	17	11
	Property/money other prisons		134	138	49	27
H2	Total	90	157	157	66	38
I	Sentence related excluding HDC and parole		47	151	49	9
	HDC		114	256	116	67
	parole	274	9			8
	Total		170	407	165	84
J	Staff/prisoner related	12	8	5	4	14
K	Transfers	12	4	11	20	17
L	Miscellaneous total of which Risk Assessment or Board Drugs	52	85 16 8	75	19	50
	Total number of applications	502	541	783	343	311