

BOARD OF VISITORS

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR

H M PRISON CHELMSFORD

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CONTENTS

	Page No
HMPYOI Chelmsford	1
The Board	1
Progress Since Last Year	2
“A Healthier Prison”	3
Individual Areas	
- Drugs	4
- Education	4
- Healthcare	5
- Kitchen	5
- Physical Education	5
- Premises	6
- Race Relations	7
- Regimes	8
- Request/Complaints	8
- Segregation/Vulnerable Prisoners	9
- Sentence Planning	10
- Staff Training	10
- Suicide Prevention	10
- Visits	11
- Young Offenders	11
Programmes/Group work available	12
Charities	12
Abbreviations	13

Neil Orr
Chairman

Mrs Kate Abbott J.P
Vice Chairman

PROGRESS SINCE LAST YEAR (2000)

Visits has been refurbished within local constraints but facilities are not nearly large enough and need replacing.

Healthcare is an encouraging story. Funds have been allocated and plans drawn up for its total replacement. The partnership with the NHS is well advanced.

Evening association has been instituted and much appreciated by prisoners and staff.

Lifers remain a problem and too many of them languish, inappropriately, in a local gaol. With so little progress towards proper provision nationally, the Prison has instituted its own Lifers' Training Course, but this should not be the function of a local prison.

Young Offenders have become a permanent feature and staff are developing imaginative programmes for their care and rehabilitation. The BOV support the Chief Inspectors condemnation of the apparent lack of "any National Policy for their care". With the influx of YOs from London courts, there is a high percentage of inmates of ethnic diversity which is not matched by a comparable diversity of staffing. We are also concerned by the number of adults who have to be housed within YO wings for logistical reasons.

"A HEALTHIER PRISON"

After Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons had produced their very damning reports on HMP Chelmsford (1998, 1999, 2000), he produced a set of guidelines for a "Healthy Prison". These included SAFETY for prisoners and officers; mutual RESPECT; facilities for SELF IMPROVEMENT and CO-ORDINATED RESETTLEMENT. In his report for the inspection for May 2001 the Chief Inspector found conditions which were "a great deal better than anything we have seen before."

The BOV had already seen a number of initiatives and improvements which had gone unacknowledged by the Inspector in 2000 and which have noticeably accelerated since. A new Governor joined the Prison in October 2000, the Prison Minister visited in March 2001 and the Chief Inspector paid a return visit in May 2001. Each was able to contribute to, and report on, an altogether healthier prison though there is still a long way to go.

The Prison was SAFER in the period under review. There were no escapes or suicides; assaults were low at 21 in six months (annual KPI under 70); and there was noticeably better interaction and confidence in the relations between staff and inmates. The regular review of suicide prevention forms (F2052SH) was commended as "Good Practice" by the Chief Inspector. The introduction of evening association and in cell television have undoubtedly made a marked difference to harmony within the Prison.

There is noticeably more RESPECT, again born of confidence, between management, staff and inmates. Training in Race Relations, Human Rights, Investment In People, though by no means as we would like is at least in operation which was not the case last year.

There is still along way to go in encouraging prisoners to IMPROVE. Though facilities are available for both work and education, workshops, could achieve little better than 75% occupancy while education achieved only 50%. This may seem surprising when the Prison Service KPI for purposeful activity is 20 hours and Chelmsford achieves 19.9 hours year to date! Too many prisoners remain in their cells for a variety of reasons during the working day and the Board express anxiety that if there was better direction towards purposeful activity there would not be adequate places in the workshops and education to accommodate them. The Prison Service relies too heavily on the goodwill of officers and the initiatives of charities where it should be honouring its commitment to literacy, education, and work motivation with realistic funding and adequate facility time for officers.

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The RESETTLEMENT of prisoners on release is little more than a nice idea. With programmes for sentence planning, throughcare and personal officers still in their infancy and with inadequate staff facility time or personnel to see them through too many prisoners leave HMP Chelmsford illiterate and unmotivated to an uncertain future. There is little point in extolling the virtues of “seamless throughcare” if the Prison and Probation Service and Social Services are not given realistic funding for implementation.

HMP Chelmsford may be healthier but it has not reached the convalescent stage yet.

DRUGS

Exciting new developments over the last year with the promise of funding for a new REHAB centre based on F Wing.

The drugs strategy has been more active in Chelmsford this year, thanks to the dedication of several staff and CARATS, but without a Co-ordinator, the work has been fragmented and not as successful as hoped. A Drugs Co-ordinator is to take up the position in August.

A second dog is being trained and will enable the dog team to work 7 days a week.

We look forward to seeing the success of the new Strategy being implemented in the coming year.

CCTV in the visits area has been helpful in detecting the entry of drugs into the prison.

EDUCATION

The appointment of the Employment co-ordinator has created a means whereby short notice vacancies on classes can be filled by other prisoners, nevertheless, there is still plenty of room for improvement as classes are continually only 50-60% full.

There is still little provision for more able prisoners, some of whom are well motivated to apply themselves to High Education courses.

Prisoners on Rule 45 do not have adequate educational provision.

The Educational needs of YOs should be more carefully considered. At present a version of the adult programme is provided which is not entirely appropriate.

The scale of the Education programme is far too small to meet the identified educational need reported by the Chief Inspector. The Board agrees with the Chief Inspector that a full needs assessment is needed urgently.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare is undoubtedly healthier.

A new Healthcare centre is planned: £6,500,000 has been allocated for its building and plans have been produced.

Involvement in partnership with the N.H.S. is well advanced both in primary care, inpatient services and mental health.

The open ward has been replaced by an association area, and the number of beds reduced from 21 to 13, in line with national policy.

Staff have been restructured into five teams : Reception and induction; wellman and primary care; inpatients; sexual health and mental health.

Funds have been ring fenced and accommodation prepared for a Day Care unit which should be in operation shortly.

KITCHEN

The kitchen continues to give an outstanding service which is genuinely appreciated. Partial privatisation has been smoothly incorporated.

Heartbeat awards and Best Catering awards have almost become the norm. The Catering Manager fully deserved the Butler Trust certificate he received from the Princess Royal at Buckingham Palace.

PREMISES

The Board is delighted to learn, after more than eight years of insistence, that the Healthcare Centre is at last to be replaced with a new purpose built building. The enabling works will at the same time relocate the stores which is another inappropriate building in a bad state of repair. It would be a serious blow to staff morale if the main program for this work is delayed beyond the start date of April 2002.

The Laundry, which has always worked in cramped conditions and with some veteran machines, is also due to be relocated and again the Board is delighted to learn of this positive move.

The Visits Centre, while improvements have been made, is still in need of enlargement and with separate areas for vulnerable prisoners. The area for Legal Visits should also be improved taking in at the same time an updated appointments system.

With the positive momentum it is to be hoped that the original Georgian block can follow on with a programme of major refurbishment.

Meanwhile the existing premises have been well maintained throughout the year and the staffing level of the Works Department has remained generally up to complement. The one exception is the lack of a gardener where grass cutting and general maintenance has suffered. It is to be hoped that a revised salary scale will result in an early appointment being made. It is to be commended that certain areas have been painted by prisoners.

RACE RELATIONS

There are good intentions to bring in correct procedures and make the prison a safe place for prisoners and staff of all races and religions. But unfortunately, due to staff shortages, changes, pressure of other work – the usual catalogue of problems – there is still a huge gap between the plans and the outcomes. The Race Relations Management Group, scheduled to meet monthly, is often cancelled or attendance is embarrassingly small. However on one encouraging day, two prisoners were included in the proceedings and this showed just how constructive the system could be if only the resources were prioritised.

The prison is lucky to have a keen Race Relations Liaison Officer but his job is nearly impossible due to lack of facility time to investigate racist incidents. The slow or nil response to problems raised by staff and prisoners is counter-productive, compounding disillusionment and contempt for the system and undermining the efforts of the RRLO. In some cases staff or prisoner have left the establishment before the case can be dealt with.

Despite lack of time to do his specialist work, the RRLO has delivered Part 1 of the prison service race awareness training to approximately half the staff. Preparatory work is usually in his own time. It remains unacceptable that there is still no second trainer to support this difficult task.

During the year an Imam has been recruited so that Muslim prayers are now held on a regular basis. However the multi-faith area has now been moved three times this year and as yet no permanent place has been identified which would provide space and privacy on a par with the Christian Chapel.

It can only be due to the generally good nature of staff and prisoners that issues of race have not been more explosive and the BOV begs the Prison Service to ringfence the staff and facilities which are needed to make good intentions a reality.

REGIMES

The year under review started with serious concern over excessive locked hours.

The regime on both Adult and YO Wings involved lock-up after tea at 5.30pm. Furthermore, during the working day, large numbers of prisoners not involved in work or education were only getting out of cell for 1 hours exercise.

The introduction of Evening Association in April marked a vast improvement in the general regime at Chelmsford.

Getting inmates out of cell during the day is now under more positive management with the introduction of an "Employment Co-ordinator" ensuring that the prison's workshop capacity and education places are fully taken up.

The more positive management of remedial programmes for drug addiction and other behavioural problems have also increased "out of cell" activity.

This year has also seen the introduction of in-cell TV for all inmates other than those on "Basic" regime.

Whilst assured that adequate places for work and education are available, the Board is concerned that the number of prisoners locked in their cell remains in excess of 50%.

SEGREGATION WING/VULNERABLE PRISONER UNIT

“A” wing operated as a segregation unit until the beginning of January 2001 when it was closed for work on the heating system.

Until that time the prisoners were used as cleaners and kitchen staff on the wing.

Flowerpot painting and education were done in the cells. All prisoners were seen by the R45 review board once a month.

In March the unit re-opened as a Vulnerable Prisoner Unit on floors 2 & 3. The ground floor is used for the GOOD’s.

There have been many changes:-

Visits are taken in the visits centre with ordinary prisoners present. This practice can give rise to problems with the prisoners and their families.

Work placements have been found in the laundry. Each day 14 will be given work.

The main library is now used by the Vulnerable Prisoners.

The staffing on this wing is reasonably stable. This allows the Personal Officer scheme to be effective.

Drug testing is carried out regularly and to the end of July only one inmate has tested positive.

Sentence Management has not had much effect on the wing as most of the prisoners have been in the prison for some time. The Sentence Management Unit is working at getting all prisoners seen as soon as possible.

One ETS course has been completed and one Listeners course has resulted in five inmates being trained as listeners.

SENTENCE PLANNING THROUGH CARE

Sentence planning was started on 22 April 2001.
Training for staff is in hand and ongoing. The unit is fully staffed.
Two probation officers are working with the prison officers.
All new inmates within certain criteria are seen by probation and seeing staff.
Inmates who were in the prison before 22 April are gradually being seen.
As the scheme is in its infancy it will take a little time to ensure all relevant prisoners are having their sentence managed.

STAFF TRAINING

Figures for staff training are impressive. For the last three months of reporting they showed that training was 75 hours over target.

Although figures may be impressive, the Board's experience of staff training is less encouraging. Wednesday mornings are still put aside for "training". Attendance is poor and delivery disappointing. There is no lack of commitment from trainers just a lack of time. Staff need stimulating, participatory sessions from staff who have been trained in their subject and how to present it and facility time to prepare. This is not a local problem, it reflects a national failure to back rhetoric with resources.

There is more to training than a numbers game.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Happily the year passed without loss of life and a much reduced number of suicide attempts. Whilst the addition of in-cell TV and evening association are factors in this, credit must also go to management. Training has improved significantly. The awareness of staff and the completion of F2052's have been highlighted by the Chief Inspector as "Good Practice"

Samaritans have maintained excellent contact and have trained a succession of listeners. There have been up to twelve listeners in the prison at any one time and listener/P.O. meetings have occurred monthly. The availability of dedicated mobile phones for contact with the Samaritans is a further support for vulnerable prisoners.

A suicide prevention co-ordinator has been appointed. As one of the only Psychologists in this post in the country the prison is very fortunate.

A year of progress in this area.

VISITS

Many improvements over the last year, but there is still a long way to go.

The introduction of a beautiful garden outside the prison alongside an outside Visits Centre housed in a portacabin has been praised by the Minister. There is a real fear that through lack of funding, this Centre will collapse. It is funded for 8 hours a week by an outside agency and is supported by a strong band of volunteers. There is a need for more childcare throughout the morning visits. At present there is NO funding for this vital link with families from the Prison Service. The introduction of a Families Liaison Officer would be welcomed by those running the centre.

The whole visits complex is too small and needs replacing.

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Previously "B" wing has been used for convicted YOs and "C" wing for un-convicted.

The primary concern for these wings is the introduction of adult prisoners alongside YO's on "C" wing. It appears this is due to an overcrowding of adult prisoners at Chelmsford. Although normally for no more than one night it is sometimes their first night in prison and it is felt by the Board and certainly by some staff that these adult prisoners are not afforded a suitable level of immediate care or facilities. This is because they are often locked in their cells for long periods of time, not being able to mix freely with the YOs during association.

"B" wing now caters for both convicted and un-convicted YOs. However, there does not seem to be any significant problems with this. Several applications dealt with by the BOV from YOs have arisen from them being sentenced and sent to Chelmsford via London Courts, often arriving without kit, money or canteen.

Not all staff have received specialist YO training and it is important that this is addressed. Notwithstanding morale among staff appears good and the Board has encountered highly motivated staff possessing a positive proactive approach to their work. These members of staff should be congratulated on their efforts and be encouraged at every opportunity.

PROGRAMMES/GROUPWORK AVAILABLE

**Alcohol Education
Alpha Course
Chaplain's Groups
Drug Awareness
Social Life Skills
Art Class
Computer Class
Basic Skills
NVQ1 – Sports Recreation
NVQ2 – Coaching, Teaching, Instructing
BAWL – British Amateur Weightlifting
Health & Hygiene (Level 1 & 2)
Enhanced Thinking Skills
Careers Workshop
“What's next?” – YMCA
Dealing with conflict in Prison – YMCA
Understanding Benefits – YMCA
Effecting Change – Probation**

**Electrical Installation
TV aerial construction
Bike & Wheelchair repairs**

CHARITIES

**Prison Visits Centre
Inside Out Trust
Alcoholics Anonymous
Samaritans
Chaplains Group
Foundation Training Course**

INDEX OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARATs	Counselling Assessment Referral Advice
Throughcare	
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CNA	Certified Nominal Accommodation
C & R	Control and Restraint
ETS	Enhanced Thinking Skills
F2052SH	Self Harm Forms
GOOD	Good Order Or Discipline
HDC	Home Detention Curfew
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MDT	Mandatory Drug Test
NHS	National Health Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PO	Principal Officer
RR	Race Relations
RRLO	Race Relations Liaison Officer
RULE 45	Segregated Prisoners
VDTU	Voluntary Drug Testing Unit
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YO	Young Offender (17-21 years)
YOI	Young Offenders Institution