



MAGHABERRY PRISON

Independent Monitoring Board's Annual Report for 2006/07



Mission Statement

To monitor the quality of prison life, by working to ensure fairness and accountability in prison.



1 | Foreword

This Annual Report to the Secretary of State covers the activities and observations of the Independent Monitoring Board for H.M.P. Maghaberry for the period 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007.

Members of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) are appointed by the Secretary of State under the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 and are required:

To visit the prison regularly and report on the conditions of imprisonment and the treatment of prisoners;

Consider the requests and complaints made by prisoners to the Board;

Report on matters of concern to the Governor or in serious cases to the Secretary of State.

Maghaberry Prison is a highly complex institution that provides a challenging environment for all who work in it. Unlike prisons of a similar size in England and Wales it houses all categories of prisoner from high security to low risk, from life sentenced to long and short term sentenced, as well as prisoners on remand. The management and staff must provide safe, secure and humane custody for all those committed by the courts as well as continually seeking to reduce the risk of re-offending. In doing so they aim to protect the public and contribute to peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

The IMB appreciates the pressures on Prison Service management in running an establishment of such complexity. Our role is to monitor, support and challenge when necessary, issues which arise within the day-to-day running of the prison, which may have an effect on the welfare of prisoners.

During the reporting period, the prison continued to work on the action plan drawn up following the reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland published in February 2006. Many issues raised by the inspectors have been reported on and recommendations made by the IMB in past reports - issues in relation to the kitchen, healthcare, prisoners held in the Special Supervision Unit, interview areas in reception, to name but a few.

The IMB is pleased to report on areas of change and development within Maghaberry Prison. These areas include the work in relation to Safer

Custody, the Reach Team and their work in the accommodation made available in Lagan House, the opening of Wilson House within the Mourne complex which, in addition to Martin House, provides a wider regime for life sentenced prisoners and the accommodation provided in the workshops area to allow prisoners to remain at work for longer periods and reflect better the working day.

There still, however, remain some areas of major concern which this report will cover under the appropriate headings. These include the inadequacy of the kitchen and the provision of healthcare, especially in relation to prisoners with personality disorders. The rising number of prisoners being held in Maghaberry Prison built to accommodate 450 prisoners and now generally housing in excess of 800, also continues to be a matter for concern. Although the ready-to-use units are planned for erection in the near future they may, in this Board's opinion, be a short-term solution to an ever-increasing problem. With over half the prisoner population being held on remand, not only is accommodation stretched, the Board recognises the difficulties in providing a regime for prisoners whose stay may be anywhere between one week and two to three years. The Prison Service concentrates its efforts on sentenced prisoners. The Board asks if Maghaberry Prison can adequately accommodate all the regimes within the one estate.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the excellent work carried out by many of the staff working in Maghaberry. At our monthly meetings members regularly report on their witnessing of total dedication and devotion demonstrated by many individuals working in very difficult conditions. The Board also acknowledges the good working relationship it has with the governor and senior management team.

The IMB at Maghaberry has an establishment of twenty members but for the greater part of the reporting year was working below strength with fifteen. Two members, having completed twelve years service to the Board, were stood down in March. We are very grateful for the time and experience they have given to the Board and indeed to the prison. We will miss their knowledge and wisdom and we wish them well in their other endeavours.

I wish to pay tribute to our esteemed Board member Justin Gorman who died in July 2006 having almost completed twelve years on the

Board of Visitors /Independent Monitoring Board. Justin's special area of interest was in relation to suicide awareness and female prisoners when they were accommodated in Mourne House. The Board will always be grateful for all he gave to Maghaberry Prison and we all will miss him as a colleague and a friend.

Towards the latter part of the reporting year the Board welcomed seven new members appointed in January 2007. After attending training at the Prison Service College at Millisle they attended their first Board meeting in March. We look forward to working with them and being enriched by the knowledge and experience they will bring to the Board

The Independent Monitoring Board are supported in their work by the secretariat housed on the 22nd floor of Windsor House in Belfast. This service was previously provided by the NIPS based at Dundonald House. To coincide with the name change from Board of Visitors to Independent Monitoring Board the secretariat service was moved to the office of the Prisoner Ombudsman in order to underline independence from the Prison Service. Initially the move worked well however over the past year difficulties have arisen in relation to the service provision and the independence. There is a perception among prisoners and prison staff that the IMB are a branch of the Ombudsman's office. Although there are some similarities in the work of both offices and there is a necessity to work together in areas of mutual concern, it is crucial that the Board is not only independent but also seen to be so.

The Board supports the ongoing efforts of the Council of Independent Monitoring Boards in seeking a solution to the difficulties encountered in this area.

In conclusion I would like to thank all the members of the IMB of Maghaberry Prison for their selfless dedication to monitoring the conditions and treatment of prisoners held at that establishment. I wish to acknowledge the work of the editorial team and the members of the secretariat in bringing all the various contributions together. I thank my outgoing vice chair and welcome his successor. I look forward to working with each and every member of the Board over the next year. It is my privilege to serve such a dedicated team as their Chair.

James J. McAllister (Chair)

2 | Aspects of the Board's Work

During the reporting period there were 295 attendances by members of the Independent Monitoring Board to the prison. This equates to an average of 21 attendances per member of the IMB for the year.

The IMB office in the prison received 128 requests by prisoners to be interviewed by a member of the IMB and these were all actioned. In addition, a further 40 prisoners were interviewed. This was due to members liaising with Prison Officers in the Houses and being advised by them that a prisoner wished to be interviewed by an IMB member. This shows the benefit of the IMB members regularly visiting the Houses and all the other thirty one units in the prison.

As well as making rota visits to all areas of the prison on a regular basis, members attend their monthly Board meeting where information is shared and a report is presented by the Governor. Board members also attend various case conferences and sub committee meetings throughout the prison in order to monitor as effectively as possible

Members of the Board made visits to other prison establishments throughout the year. These included H.M.P. Belmarsh, a high security prison in East London and the Midland prison in Portlaoise Co. Kildare.

Five of our Board members also sit on the Council of Independent Monitoring Boards and attend regular meetings with representatives of the other prison establishments in Northern Ireland.

3 | Reception Committal and Induction

A prisoner's first days in prison begin when he disembarks from the transport at the door of the reception block. Inside this building there are various areas to accommodate prisoners as they await processing. Experienced staff interview arrivals and it is here that much of the information that they will receive over the next few days is given.

Prisoners are brought from reception to the committal landing in Roe House where the information exchange continues between prisoner and prison staff. The prisoner receives a first night pack containing tea, coffee, crisps, chocolate and biscuits. He is also allowed to make a telephone call. At committal he is interviewed by a landing officer and a member of the healthcare staff who will risk assess him.

Over the next few days the prisoner is moved to the induction landing where he will remain for three or four days to receive induction into prison life and rules, fire safety and gym safety. He will be interviewed by a governor and also meet the duty chaplain and probation officer. While all of the above seems straightforward it can prove extremely stressful to those who are new to the prison environment. While this work is carried out sensitively there is no doubt in the Board's mind that steps should be taken to ensure the prisoner develops a useful understanding of his new 'world'.

The Board appreciates that not all prisoners are in a position to take in the vast amount of information laid before them in difficult circumstances. Therefore the Board recommends that: a booklet is produced which contains, in simple and perhaps pictorial terms the required information on prison life including what a prisoner may expect during his time inside and what will be expected of him while in custody.

4 | Progressive Regime and Earned Privileges Scheme

PREPS is a scheme aimed at a), encouraging and rewarding voluntary participation in education, programmes, training, work and offending behaviour programmes;

b), to encourage pro-social behaviour within the prison and to contribute to a better controlled, safer and healthier environment for prisoners and staff and

c), to act as a mechanism for building up self-esteem and self-worth.

It is seen by many prisoners and staff alike in the simple terms of rewards for good behaviour and loss of privileges for bad behaviour. The system, which has been in operation for just over six years, was subject to a corporate review launched by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in November 2005. A public consultation of the review began in June 2006. It is anticipated that the implementation of this framework will address many of the issues which arise for prisoners on Basic, Standard and Enhanced levels and that there will continue to be a marked need for staff in residential landings to engage with prisoners to encourage and support positive behaviour. The Board continues to hold that the naming of a particular officer to whom an individual prisoner can relate would be an ideal outcome and would facilitate the encouragement of behaviour which leads to progression. This is particularly relevant for prisoners who have been on Basic for a period of more than four months.

The Board is disappointed by the delay in implementing this Framework, but understands that the work will begin in the forthcoming year to put the Corporate Framework Actions in place. The Board looks forward to monitoring this work.

5 | Resettlement

The Resettlement department is responsible for coordinating the range of services available to prisoners from the moment they arrive until they are released. The aim of the programme is to prevent re-offending by helping prisoners to deal with their offending behaviour and by equipping them to take up their place in society when they are released. It is recognised that there is a much greater chance of avoiding reoffending where the prisoner on release has somewhere to live, has a job and has productive contact with his family. The resettlement process begins with induction: during their first week prisoners are invited to sign up to the resettlement programme and given a test to assess their educational needs. Within the first 20 days the prisoner attends a resettlement board meeting, where staff from Education, Workshops, Probation, Dunlewey Alcohol and Substance Advice Service, Psychology, Chaplaincy and Security will discuss with him the programme for his stay in prison. The opportunities are not unlimited: increasing numbers of prisoners are putting a great deal of pressure upon the prison's resources and therefore the likely effectiveness of their resettlement efforts. One example of this strain can be noted from the fact that Dunlewey Alcohol and Substance

Advice Service has a waiting list of six months. Moreover Psychology can only provide courses for prisoners whose sentences will last for at least one year and even then do not have sufficient staff to take all the required courses. Furthermore, all of these services are targeted towards the sentenced population who are now in a minority in the prison. While those on remand are clearly not guilty of an offence and may not need resettled in relation to 'reoffending' there is no doubt that being in prison causes a great dislocation in their lives and many need supported to resettle back into society. While this requirement clearly grows with time on remand, there is still little services on offer other than the provision of advice on housing and Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) advice on benefits.

The Board is aware that some magistrates have been known to remark, in sentencing those who have committed crimes as a result of drug and alcohol problems, that they 'can be cured in prison'. It is a source of great regret, if not shame, that the Board must state that this is not the case.

The Board acknowledges the commitment and hard work of the team involved in resettlement. However, the Board, having recommended last year that further resources be allocated to this work, now finds that it must repeat that plea and also recommends that, with the help of additional staff in this and other key sections, some provision should be made for those on remand and for short-sentenced prisoners.

The collapse of the Personal Officer scheme is to be regretted because the input of officers on the landings who are in a position to really know the prisoners would be of great use to the resettlement team. As this becomes less the case the Board finds it necessary to recommend that all officers should receive training in the aims and purposes of resettlement.

6 | Life Sentenced Prisoners

In the light of criticisms made by the IMB in previous annual reports, the Board now accepts that it must also recognise the excellent initiatives being introduced into Martin House, for a small number of life sentence prisoners coming to the final years of their sentence. The Board is greatly encouraged to learn that, early next year, another group of lifers will be given access to a similar regime to that in Martin House.

The Board is concerned, nevertheless, with apparent slowness of response to medical emergencies which arise in Martin House. It seems that those outside the main campus of the prison tend to be positioned towards the bottom of the medical priority list.

Elsewhere the Board remains concerned at the general lack of sensitive schemes for lifers in the earlier years of their sentence. The Board argues that they should also be given a sense of purpose and should be encouraged to work and train for their future. Once again this situation has also been exacerbated by the failure of the personal officer scheme which is no longer in operation.

The Board notes the argument and arrangement that for 'operational reasons' a number of life sentence prisoners are dispersed throughout several houses in the prison. The Board views this as having a detrimental effect on both life sentenced and short sentenced prisoners. A number of lifers are held in the 'Vulnerable Prisoner' Unit and it is vital that initiatives are put in place to enable these prisoners to spend their time in a more productive manner than currently allowed for in that regime. It is a particular concern of the Board that a number of very short sentence fine defaulters have been housed on the landings in Erne (the main lifer house) which has a major adverse affect on the lifer population.

The Board recommends that steps are taken to ensure that this situation does not prevail any longer.

On a more positive note the Board is pleased with the progress made in allowing prisoners to have an input into their annual multi-disciplinary meeting by permitting them to attend and participate where appropriate.

Further recommendations by the Board are that all life sentence prisoners are housed in a unit with a staged programme leading to a more relaxed regime towards the end of their sentence. The Board also recommends that management provide more meaningful productive employment in the workshop setting.

The Board recommends that in the interest of equality, life sentence prisoners are provided with some outside recreational areas similar to those already provided at the separated houses.

7 | Healthcare

At the end of this reporting year the health care of prisoners in Northern Ireland will change from being the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Prison Service to being that of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. With the transfer to DHSSPS it is hoped that the issues contained in this report will be addressed quickly given the greater practice, scope and resources available to the DHSSPS in dealing with both the physical and mental health of prisoners.

It is with regret the Board notes that due to long term sickness, natural wastage and staff being promoted or leaving NIPS for other reasons, the staff level of primary care nurses and mental health nurses is falling significantly below the agreed staffing levels required to service the prisoner population in Maghaberry Prison. The routine distribution of medication to prisoners on a daily basis requires considerable time due to the nature of the environment and the daily ever-changing sentenced and remand prisoner population. The Board has concern regarding prisoners being admitted to the prison without adequate medical records which can result in a prisoner not receiving his required medication. This situation, together with the trauma of initial imprisonment, impacts greatly on the individual prisoner. In addition, where a prisoner has an outside hospital appointment, keeping that appointment is dependent on the availability of 'prison' transport on the relevant day.

The Board believes that where bed care is needed for a prisoner, that this is best provided as an in-patient in a DHSSPS hospital thus allowing staff within the prison hospital to attend to appropriate treatment needs of patients in dedicated equipped treatment rooms. It remains of paramount concern to the Board that prisoners who on admission to prison are presenting with mental illness, are, due to lack of resources, receiving little or no treatment of any kind for their illness. This situation frequently impacts on the overall atmosphere within the prison. As in our previous report the Board continues to argue that prison is not the place for the mentally ill.

The Board recommends that a secure unit (in Northern Ireland) other than prison should be provided for prisoners exhibiting mental illness.

8 | Special Supervision Unit (SSU)

The Board commends the Northern Ireland Prison Service for the publication of its excellent updated policy on Alcohol and Substance Misuse (July 2006). This policy places emphasis on multi-disciplinary and inter-agency cooperation to provide a seamless and holistic approach to substance misuse, its detection, prevention, management and treatment. Of particular note in the advancement of such work is the appointment of an addictions services manager based in Maghaberry who is to "ensure strategic direction, partnership working with voluntary agencies and the co-ordination of clinical audit and delivery of effective high quality and evidence based therapeutic interventions". The Board looks forward to these new developments unfolding and urges that strenuous efforts are made to ensure a speedy implementation of the new policy.

The Board is mindful that in the past such policies have sometimes been more aspirational than realities.

In order to advise, inform and guide the local policy and to address specific issues and challenges pertinent to Maghaberry, the Board urgently recommends the commissioning of the University of Ulster's final evaluation report of the Dunlewey Counselling Programme.

Prisoners are transferred to the SSU for the maintenance of good order and discipline or for the prisoner's own protection (Rule 32). The unit's primary function is to deal with disciplinary adjudications and to house prisoners who have been awarded periods of cellular confinement (CC) as the result of adjudication. The unit and its regime are designed to act as a deterrent and to present an unattractive option to normal prison life. Prisoners guilty or suspected of serious misconduct can be held in the SSU prior to and following adjudication. The unit is considered suitable for prisoners who may benefit from a period of isolation (away from other inmates) with the opportunity to consider their situation and their proposed future behaviour prior to a return to their normal location. Prisoners held in the SSU under rule 32 on a long term basis remain in the PREPS system and continue to receive weekly reports and may progress/regress as necessary. Prisoners serving CC or held under Rule 35 (4) do not retain privileges appropriate to their regime level.

During the reporting year the Board has given a high priority to monitoring the SSU with regular unannounced visits being carried out. Prisoners are always informed when an IMB visit is in progress and given the opportunity to speak in confidence to the Member/s making the visit. Board members also attend Rule 32 review meetings, as far as is practicable, and encourage the implementation of an exit strategy so that prisoners are not kept in isolation for excessively long periods.

The Board is pleased to note that work on the proposed new 'safer cells' within the unit is almost complete. Safer cells are to be used in situations where prisoners are thought to be at risk of self-harm and staff are currently being instructed on the protocol for use of this additional facility.

The Board believes that there is a requirement for the provision of additional exercise facilities for prisoners in the SSU for their general physical well being. It is understood that construction work has already commenced on a new block to add a gymnasium and visits area to the SSU. As prisoners here are locked up 23 hours a day (apart from brief periods to make use of showers, make telephone calls or to attend visits) the provision of enhanced access to reading material is a necessity.

In consequence of its monitoring over the year the Board now recommends that:

Specialist training should be provided for staff working in the SSU. Staff here regularly have to deal with difficult prisoners including those with personality disorders who present specific and extended challenges. Generally it is those prisoners with violent tendencies who remain longest in the SSU and it is imperative that staff are equipped to deal with any situation which may arise.

As Staff often have to deal with incidents of self-harm the Board recommends that regular updating of First Aid expertise is required.

The Board considers that the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance cameras are inadequate in this locality bearing in mind that the most difficult prisoners are held herein.

The Board recommends that the system is upgraded as a matter of priority. At the time of writing it is understood that work has now been programmed for this year. The Board will keenly keep itself informed of progress.

Finally, as the SSU is a particularly difficult place in which to work, with many daily challenges, consideration should be given to a more frequent rotation of staff. Moreover, a clear compact should be set out to facilitate staff in deciding which category of prisoner should be placed in the safer cells.

9 | Visits

The Prison Service are well aware of the importance of assisting prisoners to keep in contact with their families and friends and in this regard the Board welcomes the fact that new initiatives are regularly being introduced. However, with the continuing increase in the number of individuals receiving custodial sentences, the prison population is increasing and the management of the visits system has been put under severe pressure. The management of the visits regime for separated prisoners further exacerbates the problems associated with satisfying all requests for visits. The Board believes that the number of visits within the prison runs at between 10,000 and 11,000 per month and that this has placed a great deal of pressure on the visit booking system.

The Board accepts that the experience of visitors to the prison has been much improved by the introduction of the new airport style security checks. Many sections of the visiting area have been repainted in softer colours and floors have been refurbished leading to a more relaxed and less institutional setting. The air conditioning system has been upgraded to create a better environment when large numbers of visitors and prisoners are meeting. Since the last report, improvements have been made to the overall access to the visiting suite. Nevertheless, visitors still have to cross some areas which are open to the elements. Whilst the time spent in the open is relatively short, the Board still believes that visitors should be under cover from their arrival to their departure.

The Board therefore, recommends that enclosed walkways should be provided so that visitors are not subjected to the elements at any stage of their visit.

The Board notes that toilet services in the visiting area are limited and there is a need for enhancement of these facilities.

Child Centred Visits have proved to be a great success and are now available to all sentenced and remand prisoners who have served at least three months. The Board is pleased to note that separated prisoners are now participating in this scheme. These visits take place on Saturdays and due to their popularity some additional visits have been arranged on Sundays.

However, the Board is concerned that a number of prisoners do not receive any visits at all in some cases because family members have 'given up' on them in others simply because they have no friends on the outside. This can understandably create a feeling of isolation and particularly applies to foreign nationals who may already be isolated by a language barrier. Some of the increasing numbers of foreign nationals in prison do have relatives and friends who want to come to Ireland to visit them. They come from various European countries and before booking flights they need to be sure that a visiting appointment has been reserved for them. The Board acknowledges that overall a very flexible approach is taken by the prison authorities to try to facilitate as far as possible those with very significant distances to travel.

Taking all of this into account the Board recommends that the possible isolation of prisoners who do not receive any visits should be investigated and monitored and that particular attention should be paid in the case of foreign nationals. The Board notes the increasing number of foreign nationals in Maghaberry and has begun to monitor this situation more closely.

10 | Foreign Nationals

The number of foreign nationals in Maghaberry has increased dramatically over the last year. From an average of five in total prison population at any one time in the previous year, individuals from 27 different countries were committed to Maghaberry between June 2006 and February 2007. In April there were 44 foreign nationals in Maghaberry (comprising approx 4% of the prison population).

This highlights the urgent need to have a robust strategy within the prison to give appropriate support to these prisoners. Whilst there is a general awareness of the needs of these prisoners - in terms of communication, diet, religious and cultural requirements, this does not appear to permeate to all the staff or all the activities within the prison.

The Board urgently recommends consideration to developing a strategy which addresses issues such as racism, isolation and indifference. It is important that information briefings and staff training sessions within Maghaberry create a positive awareness in the prison of the different needs and cultures of its prisoners.

11 | Kitchen (Food and The Prison Environment)

This reporting year has seen a continued change in the operations and production of meals in this unit. Under capacity in the kitchen is still a concern since a kitchen built for 400 prisoners now has to serve over 800 and the structure of the kitchen, as mentioned in previous reports, continues to deteriorate. It is therefore necessary for the catering unit to augment in-house production by buying in an increasing number of ready to eat meals which the Board feels can turn out to be a high risk short term solution to the existing problem.

Several members of the Board have noted that some foreign nationals are having difficulties in understanding the menus provided. The Board feels that the menu needs to allow for cultural diversity and that this could be facilitated by specialist catering training in the light of the increasing numbers of foreign nationals in the prison.

A new scheme started at the end of October 2006 whereby prisoners working in the workshops now have their lunch in the workshop dining area is to be highly commended. After some initial problems with the type of lunch menu on offer, the system is now working and is important as it reflects the meal timings of a normal working day, so aiding resettlement. Vocational training is important in Maghaberry: it helps to fill the prisoner's time in a purposeful, meaningful and practical way and may lead to employment at the end of a sentence. It is also a critical part of resettlement strategy.

The Board recommends that a replacement main production kitchen must be provided immediately, due to pressure of under capacity and generally very poor conditions which have acute Health and Safety implications.

The Board further recommends that a risk assessment on food deliveries transported to the kitchen from the main holding bay be carried out as soon as possible.

It is a matter of concern for the Board to note that a Food Policy for Prisons is not in operation and that a planned programme of NVQ training for the food industry is not taking place. The Board recommends that a Food Policy for Prisons should be devised and implemented by the NIPS at the earliest opportunity. In addition the Board recommends that all food handlers, both those who serve in the houses and those who work in the production kitchen, should be trained to an appropriate level in all food hygiene matters.

12 | Workshops

In the last report the Board recommended that the working day could be extended by providing lunch in the workplace. This has been done and the facilities for dining in the workshops have been welcomed by staff and prisoners. There have been additional spaces made available and these have been utilised by the setting up of a plastering workshop and an industrial cleaning area which has been especially useful as the expertise gained has been used in some of the houses. There are some difficulties in this regard because of security considerations and also in the possibility of taking over the work of orderlies. There is still some space available and it is hoped to set up a workshop for training in DIY skills when staff become available. Staffing is a problem as classes are disrupted and sometimes cancelled when instructors are absent on leave, sick etc. Some consideration should be given to employing relief staff to overcome these difficulties.

The Resettlement Unit is now based in the same building as the workshops and this is an obvious bonus.

The Board recommends that every effort should be made to provide workshops which will equip prisoners for the outside world.

13 | Education

Education is an important part of many prisoners' daily routine and a structured curriculum has been set up to deliver a comprehensive range of activities. The main focus is to raise basic literacy, numeracy and computing skills, while academic, cultural, recreational and social courses are also provided as part of the overall resettlement and lifer management programmes. As stated elsewhere, these are designed to break the spiral of habitual re-offending and prepare prisoners for release.

Separated prisoners have had a second teaching space added to the accommodation in Bush and Roe. The Board is disappointed to note that despite the additional space and constant requests for a wider choice of subjects, existing classes are poorly attended. Teachers are often recording zero attendances in classes across a number of subjects.

Elsewhere the Board notes that there are still difficulties in obtaining part-time staff to address a number of curriculum deficits. As a result of this the breadth of subjects on offer to most prisoners is limited. The Board recommends that the Prison Service takes additional steps to facilitate recruitment.

Another difficulty in relation to providing education within the prison is the inadequacy of present accommodation with some teachers having to work on landings.

The Board recommends that sufficient resources are made available to enable the Education Department to meet the challenges which it is facing in a difficult environment.

14 | Library

The library, which offers books, tapes, CDs, DVDs and video cassettes for loan, continues to play an important role for many prisoners. The ambience remains friendly and accommodating. The Board notes the success of late opening which began last year and that opening hours have now been extended to an extra night and there is a Saturday opening, thus allowing prisoners to access the library for significantly longer periods during the week. In addition the library stock has been replenished with over £6,000 worth of materials added. The Board is particularly pleased to note that material has been purchased for foreign nationals and that additional books have been delivered to the SSU, the Hospital, Bush and Roe and Martin Houses.

It is in this context that the Board is disappointed to learn that the capitation figure, which the Library Board uses to calculate how much money it should spend on each prisoner, has been drastically cut in the region of 36% (from £14.00 to £9.00). Library staff have confirmed that this is similar to cuts required by local Boards in branch libraries and represents a large reduction in stock provision for 08/09.

The Board regrets this reduction in the capitation figure but accepts that it is beyond the control of local prison authorities. This leads the Board to recommend that the Prison Service considers other ways and means to offset the reduction in material that will otherwise result. The library 'readership' is clearly a captive one with extremely limited alternatives to offset this loss.

15 | Adjudications

The Board regularly monitors the adjudication process. The IMB are satisfied that hearings are held in a fair and equitable manner. Prisoners are well briefed about the process by the adjudicating governor. Each prisoner receives adequate advance notice of their hearing and has the opportunity to call any witnesses to speak on their behalf. They are also given every option to ask questions and to decide if they require legal advice. Overall, great care is taken to ensure that they understand each step in the hearing so far. The Board will continue to monitor adjudications but at this juncture states its satisfaction with the overall operation of the process.

16 | Chaplaincy

Maghaberry Prison is served by four of the five main local denominations, namely the Church of Ireland, the Free Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Presbyterian Church is not currently represented in the Chaplaincy. In addition an Imam of the Islamic faith visits the prison fortnightly and a layman attends the chaplains' meeting. However, as there is a sizable population within the prison from the Presbyterian denomination, the Board recommends that the prison authorities should continue to exert appropriate pressure on the Presbyterian Church to provide Chaplaincy cover. There is little doubt that contact with one's religious 'minister' is of great comfort to many prisoners at times when they are in particular need of support. The Board is pleased to report that the clerical support recommended in previous annual reports has been in place since January 2007.

The 'chaplains' work as a team and in the light of growing prison numbers this 'team' is under increasing pressure to extend their services. While the stress of this is not alleviated by the provision of only material support the Board is nonetheless pleased to note that the office adjoining the prison chapel is to be refurbished and used as a multi-faith room, which will no doubt help a little. The chaplains are to be relocated to an office at the back of reception.

17 | Separated Prisoners

As touched on in previous reports, we note here that the Steele Report in 2003 looked into the safety of republican and loyalist prisoners with paramilitary affiliations being housed in integrated conditions. As a result of the recommendations of this report residential areas in two different houses were created to house separately republican and loyalist prisoners, on a voluntary basis.

The regime which was put in place (known as a compact) was devised to ensure equality of treatment between the separated prisoners and those in integrated conditions and also to ensure that the lessons learnt through the management of prisoners in the Maze Prison would inform prison policy. The existence of this 'compact' means that PREPS does not apply to these prisoners. The Board is aware that this compact has been criticised by both republican and loyalist prisoners as being too restrictive in movement and facilities. A review of the compact was carried out in 2006 and the ensuing recommendations are currently being implemented. The Board gives this area of prison particular attention and is aware that there has been a number of physical improvements in the facilities available to prisoners.

A two tier system is in place with enhanced privileges being provided for those prisoners who sign up to the second tier. Work is due to be completed on all enhanced facilities by the time of the publication of this report. The board continues to monitor carefully events in both groups. In addition the Board compliments the prison on the continued successful management of this difficult situation.

18 | Prison Shop

The prison shop continues to be a necessary facility for all the prisoners. It has become apparent during the year that there is a widespread belief amongst the prisoners that some key items are overpriced. Board members have investigated this and are of the opinion that some key items do appear to have increased substantially in price in the course of the year. The Board is concerned at this as prisoners now have no real option to purchase personal items elsewhere. Aspects of this system are reminiscent of some aspects of the outlawed truck system wherein individuals were tied to a particular outlet with no opportunity to find better prices elsewhere.

The Board has also received complaints of shop closures at set holiday times e.g. Easter, July and Christmas. There are no holidays for prisoners and they may not be in a position to compensate for these periods of closure. The Board is also aware that such closures can be particularly severe on new prisoners who have been admitted at these times and cannot get necessary items.

The Board recommends that every effort is made to ensure that prisoners, already disadvantaged by their location and understandably on a very low 'income' can enjoy the best value in their purchases.

The Board recommends that a facility is put in place to compensate for the effects of shop closures in these circumstances.

19 | Recommendations

1 | The Board appreciates that not all prisoners are in a position to take in the vast amount of information laid before them at Reception, Committal and Induction. Therefore the Board recommends that: a booklet is produced which contains, in simple and perhaps pictorial terms the required information on prison life including what a prisoner may expect during his time inside and what will be expected of him while in custody.

2 | The Board acknowledges the commitment and hard work of the team involved in resettlement. However, the Board, having recommended last year that further resources be allocated to this work, now finds that it must repeat that plea and also recommends that, with the help of additional staff in this and other key sections, some provision should be made for those on remand and for short-sentenced prisoners.

3 | The collapse of the Personal Officer scheme is to be regretted because the input of officers on the landings who are in a position to really know the prisoners would be of great use to the resettlement team. As this becomes less the case the Board finds it necessary to recommend that all officers should receive training in the aims and purposes of resettlement.

4 | The Board recommends that steps are taken to ensure that very short sentence inmates i.e. fine defaulters are not housed in Erne (the main lifer house) which has a major adverse affect on the lifer population and that the situation does not prevail any longer.

On a more positive note the Board is pleased with the process made in allowing prisoners to have an input into their annual multi-disciplinary meeting by permitting them to attend and participate where appropriate.

5 | Further recommendations by the Board are that all life sentence prisoners are housed in a unit with a staged programme leading to a more relaxed regime towards the end of their sentence. The Board also recommends that management provide more meaningful productive employment in the workshop setting.

6 | The Board recommends that in the interest of equality, life sentence prisoners are provided with some outside recreational areas similar to those already provided at the separated houses.

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7 | The Board recommends that a secure unit (in Northern Ireland) other than prison should be provided for prisoners exhibiting mental illness.

8 | In order to advise, inform and guide the local policy and to address specific issues and challenges pertinent to Maghaberry, the Board urgently recommends the commissioning of the University of Ulster's final evaluation report of the Dunlewey Counselling Programme.

9 | As Staff often have to deal with incidents of self-harm the Board recommends that regular updating of First Aid expertise is required.

10 | The Board considers that the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance cameras are inadequate in the Special Supervision Unit (SSU) bearing in mind that the most difficult prisoners are held herein.

The Board recommends that the system is upgraded as a matter of priority. At the time of writing it is understood that work has now been programmed for this year. The Board will keenly keep itself informed of progress.

11 | The SSU is a particularly difficult place in which to work, with many daily challenges, consideration should be given to a more frequent rotation of staff. Moreover, a clear compact should be set out to facilitate staff in deciding which category of prisoner should be placed in the safer cells.

12 | The Board believes that visitors should be under cover from their arrival to their departure. The Board therefore, recommends that enclosed walkways should be provided so that visitors are not subjected to the elements at any stage of their visit.

The Board notes that toilet services in the visiting area are limited and there is a need for enhancement of these facilities.

13 | The Board is concerned that a number of prisoners do not receive any visits at all. In some cases because family members have 'given up' on them in others simply because they have no friends on the outside. Taking this into account the Board recommends that the possible isolation of prisoners who do not receive any visits should be investigated and monitored and that particular attention should be paid in the case of foreign nationals.

The Board notes the increasing number of foreign nationals in Maghaberry and has begun to monitor this situation more closely.

14 | The Board urgently recommends consideration to developing a strategy which addresses issues such as racism, isolation and

indifference. It is important that information briefings and staff training sessions within Maghaberry create a positive awareness in the prison of the different needs and cultures of its prisoners.

15 | The Board recommends that a replacement main production kitchen must be provided immediately, due to pressure of under capacity and generally very poor conditions which have acute Health and Safety implications.

16 | The Board further recommends that a risk assessment on food deliveries transported to the kitchen from the main holding bay be carried out as soon as possible.

17 | It is a matter of concern for the Board to note that a Food Policy for Prisons is not in operation and that a planned programme of NVO training for the food industry is not taking place. The Board recommends that a Food Policy for Prisons should be devised and implemented by the NIPS at the earliest opportunity. In addition the Board recommends that all food handlers, both those who serve in the houses and those who work in the production kitchen, should be trained to an appropriate level in all food hygiene matters.

18 | The Board recommends that every effort should be made to provide workshops which will equip prisoners for the outside world.

19 | The Board recommends that sufficient resources are made available to enable the Education Department to meet the challenges which it is facing in a difficult environment.

20 | The Library Board has reduced the total spend on each prisoner by 36%. The Board regrets this reduction in the capitation figure but accepts that it is beyond the control of local prison authorities. This leads the Board to recommend that the Prison Service considers other ways and means to offset the reduction in material that will otherwise result. The library 'readership' is clearly a captive one with extremely limited alternatives to offset this loss.

21 | There is a widespread belief amongst the prisoners that some key items in the tuck shop are overpriced. The Board recommends that every effort is made to ensure that prisoners already disadvantaged by their location and understandably on a very low 'income' can enjoy the best value in their purchases.

22 | The Board recommends that a facility is put in place to compensate for the effects of shop closures at set holiday periods.

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