



**imb** Independent  
Monitoring  
Board

MAGHABERRY PRISON

Independent Monitoring Board's Annual Report for 2005/06



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## Mission Statement

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



## 1 | Foreword

**This Annual report covers the activities and the observations of the Independent Monitoring Board for Maghaberry Prison for the period 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006.**

Members of the IMB, appointed by the Secretary of State under the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 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, the Secretary of State.

During this reporting period the Prison has undergone an announced inspection by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland. Their report, released in February 2006, made 171 recommendations. Alongside the publication of the report, the Prison Service published an action plan to address the findings of the Inspectorate. The IMB welcomes the action plan and will continue to monitor the issues addressed.

In addition to the inspection the Prison service carried out a review of the separated regime just over one year after its introduction. The review, published in January 2006, made 25 recommendations and work began immediately on the implementation of a number of these issues.

The Board continue to be concerned by the many issues in the prison as addressed in the following pages of this report. The major issues this year continue to be healthcare and the kitchen. The report makes four recommendations in each area and the Board urges that these recurring issues are addressed as a matter of high priority.

This Board wishes to acknowledge the good work of many of the staff working in Maghaberry Prison. The Board members regularly report on the total dedication and devotion demonstrated by many individuals working in difficult conditions. In addition to this the Board also acknowledges the good working relationship it has with the Governor and the senior management team.

During the reporting year the Board members took part in a number of training events organised by the Council for Independent Monitoring Boards (CIMB) and facilitated by the Secretariat at the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office. Members also travelled to Birmingham Prison and three Prisons in Dublin – Mountjoy, Cloverhill and the Dochas Centre, to look at best practice in various areas of these establishments and report back to their own board members.

The IMB at Maghaberry has an establishment of twenty members but has worked at one below that figure for all of the reporting period. During the year four members retired having completed twelve years service. I, as Chair, wish to record the appreciation of the Board for the selfless work and tireless effort made by those members. Their contribution to the Board and indeed to the life of prisoners in this establishment will never be fully known. We thank them and wish them well in their other ventures. I would also like to welcome our new member who has settled in well and is already making a remarkable contribution to the work of the Board.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the work of my predecessor who held the Chair for two years. On her behalf I wish to thank the Vice-Chair, the training officer and the secretariat for the support they have given in carrying out the task. I wish also to thank the editorial team for their assistance in collating this report. Finally I want to thank each member for their contribution to the report and for their work in the prison over the past year. I want to state without reservation that I am privileged to work with such a group, representative of all that is good in our society.

**James J. McAllister**  
Chairman  
Maghaberry Independent Monitoring Board.

## 2 | Aspects of the Board's Work

**During this reporting period Members made over 300 visits to Maghaberry Prison to look specifically into concerns raised by prisoners and to monitor the operation of various regimes. Over the year there were nearly 150 requests from prisoners wishing to discuss issues with Board Members. Significantly, this represented a fall of approximately 50% on the number of requests made to the Board in the previous reporting period. It is the Board's belief that the current Governor's encouragement of speedy internal solutions to simple misunderstandings and problems and the establishment of the Prisoner Ombudsman's office can in part explain this fall in numbers. Members have not viewed the decrease negatively. The fall in complaints has rather released members from attending to more commonplace and recurring problems and has allowed them to spend more time 'walking the landings' and getting a more in depth view and wider overview of prison life. Their role is increasingly becoming that of monitoring rather than visiting – as reflected in the recent title change of the organisation.**

In addition to responding to prisoners' expressed requests, Members also regularly attend monthly Board meetings. Amongst other things these provide an opportunity for Members to note and question the Governors monthly report and to discuss with him a range of arising issues and concerns. On a practical level it also affords both Members and Governor an opportunity to update each other on developments and points of interest.

Members also continue to be involved with more specialist working groups including the Suicide Awareness Group, the Drugs Strategy Group, the Chaplaincy, the anti Bullying strategy and international educational relationships. Members in addition regularly monitor adjudications wherein charges are laid against prisoners for various internal breaches of discipline. The Board continues to examine the extensive paperwork used in the administration of adjudications. The Board is always concerned to ensure that prisoners are given sufficient notice and that care is taken to make sure that they understand the charges they face.

**The Board recommends that prisoners should be made aware of the current monitoring and complaint systems. There are a number of different methods available for prisoner complaint resolution such as; the commitment of Governors to resolve minor issues swiftly at local level and the Prisoner Ombudsman's complaints system. Prisoners should be aware of the reference point most suitable to their needs and how recall to one is not exclusive but that all may be employed at various stages as appropriate.**

## 3 | Reception Committal and Induction

**The Reception Unit is a large and spacious area where prisoners have their first experience of the prison. The staff there are courteous and act in a professional manner making the initial assessment of the prisoner and booking him into the prison system.**

As reported in previous years, the interviews conducted with prisoners at the reception desk are not entirely private despite the wooden dividers. A number of booths placed with adequate separation would be more acceptable.

The information material given to the prisoner at this stage does not take into account poor reading ability and although the staff give a brief explanation, there is still a lot of information for the first time prisoner to comprehend.

The Board recommends that prisoners be provided with a brief simple booklet, sectioned into areas and topics which can be addressed in the first week of reception. Prisoners will have time to read over and ask clarification on areas of which they are unsure.

During induction a member of the healthcare staff carries out an initial medical assessment while an officer on the induction landing also carries out an initial interview.

The following day the prisoner is interviewed by a Governor and a probation officer after which he moves to the induction landing. He will spend the next three to four days there before being sent to a residential house. Induction consists of an introduction to fire safety and gym safety as well as an introduction to prison life and prison rules. There is no formal structure to the induction and the staff are not specially trained.

**The Board recommends that a team of officers are specially trained and dedicated to the Committal and Induction units.**

## 4 | Progressive Regime and Earned Privileges Scheme

This is the system which has been adopted by most prisons in the UK; it is based on rewards for good behaviour and loss of privileges for poor behaviour. The system, which has been in operation for six years, has recently been undergoing a very thorough review across the three Northern Ireland prisons. Before this review began, there was a consultation process with the prisoners, which elicited a 33% response, showing that there was a good understanding of the system. Among the contentious areas discussed were the linkage with voluntary drug testing, the effectiveness of personal officers, the relationship with resettlement and the opinion of the Chief Inspector that a single act should not be enough to warrant a drop in regime level. Consideration has been given to providing greater incentives for Basic prisoners and perhaps allowing more visits for Enhanced.

At the end of the reporting year, discussions were still ongoing but certain outcomes can be expected such as additional training for all landing staff in the skills required of a personal officer.

The Board believes that this is a recognition that the personal officer system in Maghaberry has broken down. Board Members have noted that while weekly prisoner report forms are now dutifully completed by officers, the remarks entered are rarely of an insightful nature. While the training of all officers in these skills might be beneficial, the Board believes that the naming of a particular officer to whom the prisoner can relate is still the ideal outcome.

**The Board strongly believes that there is a requirement for prison staff to take positive action to encourage the progression of prisoners who have been on Basic for a period of more than 4 months.**

## 5 | Resettlement

The resettlement strategy in Maghaberry encompasses almost every aspect of prison life. The principle behind it is that, as soon as a prisoner arrives in prison, the institution is putting in place a system which plans for his eventual release and successful re-integration into society.

Prison officers work with a range of other bodies and groups to deliver a multi-agency approach to the offender to deal with offending behaviour, addiction, education, and work training and, most innovative of all, relationships with the families of prisoners. The appointment of Family Support Officers has already been shown to be of great benefit to prisoners and the many interesting initiatives in respect of families have been highly commended by the Chief Inspector of Prisons. These include the expansion of child-centred visits, the Barnardos parenting programme, the Relate relationship course and the book and tape programme, described in the Education section of this report.

Two major features of the resettlement strategy towards the end of a sentence are help with housing and employment and the consideration of public protection; the involvement of other statutory agencies in these aspects is obviously of great importance.

A particular obstacle in the way of extending resettlement to all prisoners is that many prisoners on short sentences leave prison without being interviewed by resettlement staff and there is currently not the capacity to engage with prisoners on remand. There is also evidence that some prisoners do not feel fully involved in their resettlement plans, perhaps because there are no longer personal officers in Maghaberry. The staff engaged on resettlement are enormously dedicated and energetic but seem to be suffering from a great pressure of work which prevents them from meeting all their demanding targets.

**The Board recommends that the prison allocates more resources to this all-important work.**

## 6 | The Working Out and Detainees' Unit

The pre-release unit at Crumlin Road continues to provide a good environment for prisoners who are close to release. The Board was pleased to learn towards the end of the year that Government had decided that immigration detainees were no longer to be held in prison. The Board, throughout the period of this report, frequently felt it necessary to raise the issue of detainees with the prison authorities. This development, while being fairer to detainees who had never been charged with an offence, will also be of benefit to the prison, in freeing up some accommodation for other prisoners.

## 7 | Life Sentenced Prisoners

The Board has often lamented the fact that lifers in Maghaberry are much worse off than they would be in England because the only improvement they can look forward to is the top landing in Erne House. The Board is, therefore, pleased to note that prison management have opened a landing in Martin House (part of Mourne House) for lifers who are near the end of their sentences and whose behaviour is appropriate.

**The Board welcomes the introduction of regular multi-disciplinary meetings to conduct annual reviews of life sentenced prisoners and the recent decision to encourage lifers to attend.**

## 8 | Healthcare

It is gratifying to be able to report that significant progress has been made in dealing with a number of the issues highlighted by the Board in earlier reports. Several quite basic cosmetic changes have transformed a number of the healthcare working areas.

Arrangements for using psychiatric expertise have improved and it is commendable that the practice of moving medically or psychiatrically ill patients to the SSU has now stopped.

Provision of facilities for the disabled remains inadequate and action to address this deficiency should be given priority.

It is noted that the shift pattern for healthcare staff has not been changed to facilitate clinical management as previously recommended. This should be remedied in order to achieve measurable improvement.

Care of prisoners who present with recurring psychiatric illnesses and mental disorders still absorb a disproportionate share of scarce healthcare resources.

**The Board recommends that the idea of having a separate landing in one of the houses to act as a 'half-way house' is worthy of further consideration as such action could do much to ameliorate the situation.**

Further attention needs to be given to an apparent deficit in clinical psychology provision. The unit has been short of two staff for a considerable time without replacement.

**The Board believes that this situation is indefensible given the needs of prisoners and recommends that this shortage is rectified by appointing replacement qualified staff as soon as possible.**

Although some improvements have been observed in the provision of psychiatric care there is still no adequate community psychiatric nursing input.

**The Board recommends that this deficit is addressed as quickly as possible.**

The proposal to transfer lead responsibility for prison healthcare to DHSS & PS is welcomed and likely to lead to a substantial improvement to the quality of service being offered. This does not imply any criticism of existing staff who have maintained a service in very challenging circumstances. Staff are still anxious about these impending changes and in particular are fearful about the prospect of a possible imposition of changes to their terms and conditions of employment.

**The Board recommends that every effort is made to reassure these staff and provide adequate information to enable their understandable fears to be assuaged as far as is possible.**

## 9 | Special Supervision Unit (SSU)

Members continued throughout the year to pay particular attention to the SSU during weekly rota visits. Prisoners were made aware of the Board's presence on the landings in order to facilitate them in raising any issues or areas of concern to them. It was possible to visit prisoners in their cells and interview rooms as appropriate and staff worked to ensure the privacy of those conversations while meeting the high demands of security and safety. This is particularly necessary in this unit given the special circumstances of many prisoners who are housed here. However, at times this can seem 'oppressive' as four Members of staff generally accompanied and 'stood by' Board Members during these engagements.

The Board believes that members must regularly monitor the prisoners held in the SSU since they are no longer involved in signing a Rule 32. The Board is facilitated in its access to Rule 32 paper work to keep itself informed of the appropriateness of procedures and to monitor any significant elements of the case under question. Board members are also encouraged to attend case conferences to discuss prisoners in the SSU.

There is little doubt that many of the individuals who are sent to the SSU at times present specific challenges to the prison authorities. This is in part exacerbated by the mental health problems suffered by many prisoners. Officers appear to be sympathetic and supportive but the Board noted that no specialist training has been given to officers for work within this specialist unit. While the unit is staffed by members of the Standby Search Team (SST) this reflects and responds to the greater security needs often attached to the unit but makes no provision for those who are more vulnerable for other reasons.

Several prisoners held in the unit throughout the year are confined there for their own safety. While there is no doubt that those in this position understand, accept and support this arrangement, there is still a need to review those held for long periods of time and to develop an exit strategy.

**The Board yet again finds itself in the position of recommending that staff receive more specialised training in coping with and understanding prisoners with personality disorders.**

## 10 | Duty of Care

A new suicide and self-harm policy is being developed which will ensure a stricter monitoring of prisoners who have been identified as vulnerable. It is, however, very disappointing that the Listener scheme has still not got off the ground. The Board hopes that the provision of 'safer cells', the absence of which has long been a concern, are now not far away. Even with the provision of such cells the Board is aware that pressures of inmate numbers in Maghaberry are causing strains and that overcrowding is not conducive to attaining the desired improvements.

The Board welcomes the fact that all Night Custody Officers have now had special training in rescue procedures. And that the Vulnerable Prisoners' Unit has been moved to a new wing in Glen House where there are better facilities, including more frequent use of a gym.

## 11 | Visits

One of the stated aims of the Northern Ireland Prison Service is that 'special attention shall be paid to the maintenance of relationships between a prisoner and his family'. Perhaps the most effective method of achieving this aim is through the prison facilitating a visit for an inmate with his family and friends.

With the available visits area and the facilities which are offered, this cannot be an easy task given that in one month alone in the past year, over 10,000 visits were booked through the booking system. Security is a genuine concern, due to the risk of items being smuggled in through visits; therefore surveillance through cameras, staff vigilance and the passive drug dogs is of the utmost importance. We are concerned at the quality of camera surveillance and the facility for staff in using this equipment. Therefore we recommend an urgent upgrade of this system.

The visits area is divided into two rooms, one for separated prisoners and one where sentenced and remand prisoners share visits. There is a creche and coffee bar facility which is staffed by the Quakers. While facilities are clean and tidy they are also somewhat outdated and depressing. There is poor air conditioning and the environment is not particularly child-friendly.

Care for the children of the visitors is extremely important, both in ensuring their welfare and in making the environment welcoming and pleasant, thus helping the visitor to feel as much at ease as is possible in the circumstances. The Board remains concerned that the booking in and out of children is not precise and feel that the system needs to be corrected to resolve this.

**The Board recommends refurbishment of the visits areas. In addition the Board recommends that the booking method for children in and out of visits is urgently reviewed and improved.**

**The Board recommends the provision of improved surveillance facilities and associated equipment for staff and the upgrading of the current air conditioning system.**



## 12 | Drugs Strategy Report

Reflecting the prevalence of drugs in the general population, there has been a corresponding increase in drug misuse within Maghaberry. However there is evidence to suggest that whilst the number of 'finds' has risen, the quantities recovered tend to be smaller. Consequently it is vital that effective deterrents and therapeutic measures are vigilantly promoted in order to prevent a drug culture becoming firmly embedded within the prison. The Multi-Disciplinary Drug Strategy Group, which includes Board participation, has met regularly throughout the year. Sadly several changes in leadership personnel have, given the complex nature of the task, adversely impacted on continuity and performance.

**The Board recommends that the prison service accords higher priority to this important area so that knowledge and expertise can be developed.**

Counselling continues to be provided by Dunlewey, who during the year amassed a significant waiting list. Any such independent provider working in prison must be able to work imaginatively, collaboratively and in partnership with staff from all the other disciplines. Unfortunately this has not always been the case. Having read the interim evaluation of the Dunlewey Counselling Programme, the Board would welcome the commissioning of the Final Report by the University of Ulster.

**As recommended in previous years, the Board continues to recommend the development of special services and treatment for those with alcohol addictions.**



## 13 | Video Link Suite

The Video Link Suite is now operational to all court houses throughout the province.

**The Board recommends that communications between court staff and video link staff be improved to alleviate situations such as prisoners having to be held in this area for a number of hours after they have ceased to be required by the court.**



## 14 | Kitchen

This reporting year has seen a change in the operations and production of meals in this unit. The catering unit is now purchasing more high-risk, ready-to-eat foods. Under capacity in the kitchen is still a concern; a kitchen built for 400 prisoners now has to serve over 700. The structure of the production kitchen, as stated in previous reports, continues to deteriorate.

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

**The Board recommends that urgent steps are taken to replace the main production kitchen, due to pressure of under capacity and generally very poor conditions which would have Health and Safety implications.**

**The board recommends that the Prison Service should develop a Food Policy for Prisons.**

**The Board recommends (for the fourth year in a row) that the timing of meals be reasonably spaced and that service times should reflect a normal day.**

**The Board recommends that food handlers who serve in each of the houses should be trained to an appropriate level in all food hygiene matters.**



## 15 | Prisoner Escort Group

The Prisoner Escort Group (PEG) continues to operate under in-house management.

**The Board recommends that arrangements are put in place to enable prisoners who have been transported to court and subsequently released, are provided with a discharge grant where entitled. This includes the return of their property and cash, or arrangements are made for them to return to prison for this to take place.**



## 16 | Workshops

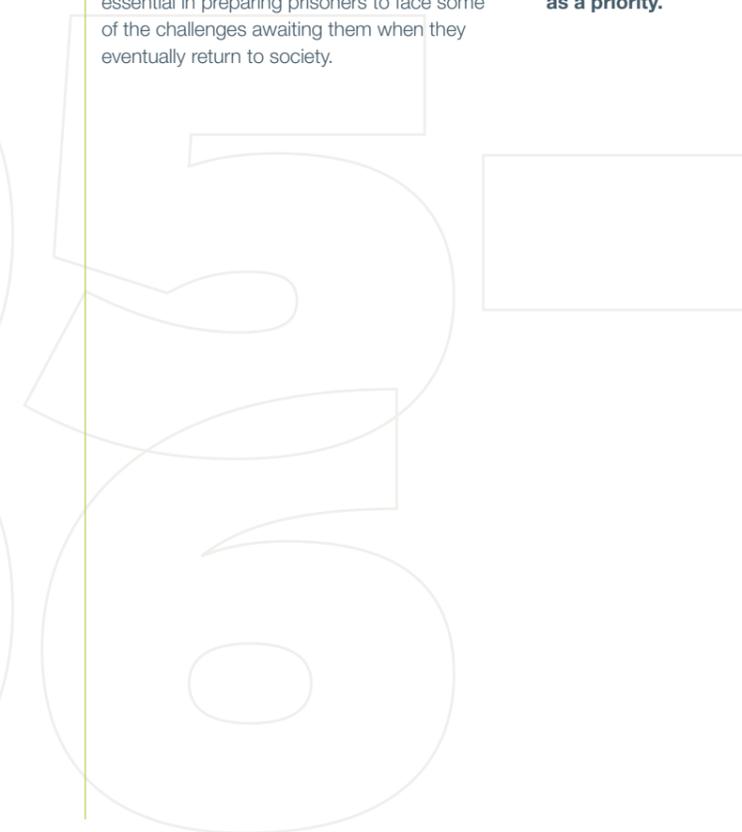
Vocational training is important within Maghaberry. It helps to fill the prisoners' time in a purposeful, meaningful and practical way and has the bonus that it may lead to the offer of a job when they return to civilian life. Like education, vocational training is part of the resettlement strategy.

In its last report this Board recommended that the working day should be extended and that lunch facilities should be provided in the work location. The Board is pleased to note that contractors have commenced a programme of works to carry out extensive alterations to the workshop area which will enable prisoners to have a longer day and therefore one more reflective of an 'ordinary' work regime. In this regard courses are also changing to reflect the evolving job markets to which prisoners will one day return. This is a key element of the resettlement programme in Maghaberry. Many prisoners still need to adapt to a set routine in a regular working environment in keeping with the outside world. The Board welcomes this and acknowledges that it is essential in preparing prisoners to face some of the challenges awaiting them when they eventually return to society.

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 and numeracy standards, while academic, cultural, recreational and social courses are also provided. This is part of the overall resettlement programme which has been designed to break the spiral of habitual re-offending and prepare prisoners for release.

The situation for separated prisoners is slightly more difficult as there is currently only one classroom available in each block. This means that only one activity can take place at a time, which restricts choice.

**The Board has consistently supported the efforts of the Education Department as critical to prisoner well being and development. This cannot be done with the current level of resources and the Board recommends that resources, including extra teaching staff, are provided as a priority.**



## 17 | Library

The library, which offers books, tapes, CDs and videos for loan, continues to play an important role for many prisoners. Staffing levels have been upgraded and much effort has gone into improving the opening times and increasing the availability of the service. The result is that more use is being made of the facility and the annual footfall at the time of writing is already well up on the previous year. A trial of late night opening took place and due to its success this facility has now been incorporated as a standard service. New stock is being purchased to set up a mini library at Martin House, which was recently opened to accommodate some life serving prisoners.

An important initiative of the resettlement strategy is a facility for fathers to record a children's story onto an audiotape, which can then be sent home for family members. It provides an important ongoing link in helping to maintain contact between fathers and their young children. An experiment is ongoing to improve the recordings by adding background music using computer enhancement to produce a more professional and enjoyable result for the child.

**The Board notes and welcomes these improvements.**

## 18 | Chaplaincy

With the various degrees of security within Maghaberry, the timing of the various religious services has to be very closely choreographed. Often staff do not see this as important and delays in escorting prisoners to and from the chapel for religious services leads to the services having to be cut short or the chaplain not having the required engagement time with his congregation.

The Prison Service is carrying out a review of the Chaplaincy service within the prisons. This review is likely to last into the next reporting year and the IMB await its outcome with interest.

Last year the Board recommended that clerical assistance be provided to the chaplains to enable them to carry out their role more effectively. This has in part been provided but only on a temporary basis.

**The Board recommends that the prison service provides administrative support on a permanent basis.**

## 19 | Appendix

### Chairman

Mrs E Cummings

### Vice-Chairman

Dr M Boyle

### Members

Miss V Boland

Mr L Brennan

Mrs D Brown

Mr J Gorman

Mrs R M Hewitt

Mrs L Jennett

Mr G Martin

Mr J J McAllister

Mr D J McBurney

Mrs C McCarty

Mr N McKenna

Mr A Quinn

Mr C N Quinn

Mrs P McCusker

Mrs V Patterson

Mrs M Elliott



