

An IMB Board Article for Publication in the Prison Magazine at HMP Gartree. Please adapt as appropriate for use in internal establishment magazines as it is aimed at informing prisoners and detainees about IMBs.

Chocolate Teapots

At a recent Induction meeting with prisoners, the general consensus about the IMB was they are about as useful as a chocolate teapot!

Amongst the views expressed was "we are the Board of Visitors, we give out punishment against offenses at Adjudications"

NO! We used to be just that but some five years ago we changed and hence the name changed to INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD. The emphasis is on the word INDEPENDENT. In the past the Board comprised a number of Magistrates, today we have only one and he does not operate as a magistrate within the prison.

Another view was "we are just a bunch of do gooders who have no authority to change anything we are just nosey parkers."

YES we have no authority to change anything, and if by being a do gooder it means we are the buffer between the system and the prisoners then YES again. Just think for a minute what would be the situation if we were not around? Who would be about to see if the system was not abusing its authority. Who would be about to see if we can influence change if we see something is unfair? When we are not available, who else is there?

Another question asked "So what do you do?"

Investigate when things seem wrong. We are available to you to send us confidential applications when you feel aggrieved about something and cannot get satisfaction when going through your personal officer. You do this by using the blue forms on each wing, sealing it in an envelope provided addressed to the IMB and posting it on the Main Corridor in the secure letter box marked IMB. No prison officer has access to this box and the envelopes are collected by IMB members and opened by them in their office. All this is confidential. We then look at your problem, it could be to do with property, with available places on programmes, with how you have been dealt with for a misdemeanor. almost anything.

How to do investigate?

First we see what your personal officer has entered onto his report, (hence it is essential you go through him first). We then follow up by talking to who he has talked to or even by going higher in the management system. We then see you and report back to you what we have done. Often you raise concerns about what has been said and give us more information to follow up. We do this until we have a reply. This is then discussed with you, hopefully it is what you want to hear but if not you still have other options open to you, by using your solicitor or the Ombudsman. Our response to your application we hope should take no longer than 6/7 days but it can take longer depending on availability of staff. Should you take the complaint to your solicitor or the Ombudsman before coming to us, we have to step back, and let those actions take their course which can take months, but the choice is yours.

What else do we do?

Almost every meeting that takes place within the prison, wing staff meetings, diversity, visits, probation, education, workshops, you name it we are there, to hear about what is happening and see how it affects you. We attend sentence planning meetings, to listen to the progress and what is holding you back from progressing. We do react when we hear things and take these matters up at

the monthly Board Meeting with have with the Governor. We do get results, we do fail. But whatever result we get is progress and helps someone or all of you to improve your lot.

Don't get us wrong, we are neutral, we are not on your side nor are we are the side of the system, we are hear to monitor fairness within the system

So when you see us wondering about, and with fourteen Board members, you will see us most days around the place, perhaps you will understand we are trying to monitor what is happening and trying to make Gartree a better stepping stone for you.

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