

Eastern Region Families Partnership



Time for Families

**HMP & YOI Chelmsford:
Visits & Family Ties Survey**

2005

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

This report has been produced by the Ormiston Children and Families Trust as part of its *Time for Families* programme. The aim of the survey was to examine the provision at HMP Chelmsford for maintaining and strengthening the family ties of prisoners and to look at changes which have taken place since a similar survey was carried out here in 2003. A summary of the recommendations from the 2003 survey and the progress made towards implementing them can be seen in the final section of this report (5.0).

1.2 Ormiston Children and Families Trust

This is a voluntary organisation providing both community and prison-based services for children and families in the eastern region. It has been engaged in work with families of prisoners in this region since 1989.

1.3 The Time for Families programme

Time for Families is a region-wide initiative established by, and funded through the Eastern Region Families Partnership (ERFP). The Partnership combines the funding power and strategic goals of three organisations: Ormiston Children and Families Trust, the LankellyChase Foundation and HM Prison Service, to meet the needs of the children and families of prisoners.

Time for Families supports families affected by imprisonment by working within prisons and in the community, and with partner agencies such as schools, social and community services. Key aims of the initiative are the provision of good quality visiting and contact opportunities in prison, and delivery of support and information for children and families. *Time for Families* also provides parenting courses in prisons and is working to enhance the role of families in resettlement.

This initiative now has projects based in six prisons in the Eastern Area, as well as four community based posts providing support to schools, information and support for families and action research.

In 2004, following an assessment of needs identified in the 2003 'Visits and Family Ties' survey, a new *Time for Families* post was established at HMP Chelmsford. An additional part-time project worker has since been employed to enable a programme of Children's Visits, parenting education and one-to-one support to be established. The project links closely with the *Time for Families*' community project in Essex, 'Time for Children and Young People'. This facilitates the provision of support and liaison to children and families of prisoners in HMP Chelmsford.

One of the key objectives of *Time for Families* is:

“To consult extensively with children and families, thereby enabling their views to influence how services are developed.”

The views of all those who contributed to this survey will help to inform the way services are provided and develop good practice within the prison and the region.

1.4 Importance of strengthening family ties

The importance of family involvement in the successful resettlement of offenders is emphasised in many recent research studies and government reports.

The 2002 Social Exclusion Unit report, *Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners*, stated:

Maintaining family relationships can help to prevent prisoners re-offending and can assist them to successfully settle into the community. However support and advice for families is limited, visiting facilities are often inadequate, and families are rarely involved in the process of tackling offending behaviour. (chapter15)

The Report recommended that:

Sufficient opportunities should be made available for positive family access and contact.

In response, the Home Office produced the *Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan* (2004). This stresses the importance of family support in reducing reoffending and highlights the value of partnership working to achieve this. The Plan seeks to identify best practice on:

- maintaining contact during sentence, including how prisons make the environment more attractive and family friendly;
- teaching of parenting skills to prisoners
- provision of advice, including through the Prisoners' Families Helpline.

Ormiston's *Time for Families* initiative also links with the desired outcomes of *Every Child Matters*, the Government's vision for children's services. The 2003 *Every Child Matters* Green Paper drew attention to the financial, emotional and health problems often suffered by children having a parent in prison. The impact of these issues on children and young people in the eastern region was highlighted in the recent study undertaken by Ormiston, *Sentenced Families (2004)*.

2.0 Methodology

Information was gathered from a wide variety of sources:

- Questionnaires to prisoners
- Questionnaires to visitors
- Meetings and informal conversations with staff and volunteers
- Observation of a social visit and a Children's Visit
- Analysis of comments in the Visitors Centre comments book
- Feedback given to Ormiston staff about social and children's visits

2.1 Questionnaires to prisoners

Advance notice was given via posters throughout the prison and by a Prisoners' Information Notice explaining the purpose of the survey.

Questionnaires were drawn up by the Ormiston researcher in consultation with staff, with valuable assistance from the prison service psychologists. To address difficulties which might be encountered with literacy or language, these were undertaken face to face with prisoners.

A sample of 100 prisoners was taken from a spread of prisoners in the workshops, laundry, in education and on the wings (around a fifth of the total roll). Preference was given to enlisting participants who were fathers. A small incentive (a Mars Bar) was given to those who took part.

2.2 Questionnaires to families

The views of families were sought via questionnaires. These were available in the Visitors Centre to complete either alone or with the assistance of Visitors Centre staff and volunteers. There were 30 questionnaires completed here.

Additionally, in order to enable non-visiting relatives of prisoners to give their views too, prisoners were invited to give contact details of a relative to whom a questionnaire could be sent. Thirty people were sent questionnaires by post and ten postal forms were returned, giving a total of 40 completed questionnaires from families.

2.3 Views of staff and volunteers

The Governor and staff of HMP Chelmsford, together with Ormiston project staff, gave their full cooperation and assistance with carrying out the survey. Contacts included the Heads of Operations and Resettlement, the Visitors Centre Co-ordinator and volunteers, an IMB member, visits staff and Booking Clerks. All were invited to feed in their comments on any aspect of the survey.

2.4 Observation of a social visit and a Children's Visit

One social visit session in the visits room was observed and one children's visit day in the gym. During the latter there was an opportunity to briefly meet education and chaplaincy staff who deliver the 'Fathers Inside' course and chat to prisoners, their partners and children taking part.

2.5 Analysis of comments in the Visitors Centre comments book

This book enables any visitor to the Visitors Centre to make a comment anonymously if they wish. Comments from the book were analysed and grouped by theme.

2.6 Feedback given to Ormiston staff about social and children's visits

Ormiston staff have been routinely gathering the views of prisoners, their children and parents about social visits and Children's Visits, which they then collated and displayed. These are also included in this report.

2.7 Collation and analysis

Data collection and analysis of the all the information gathered during the survey and the writing up of this report was carried out by Time for Families' action researcher.

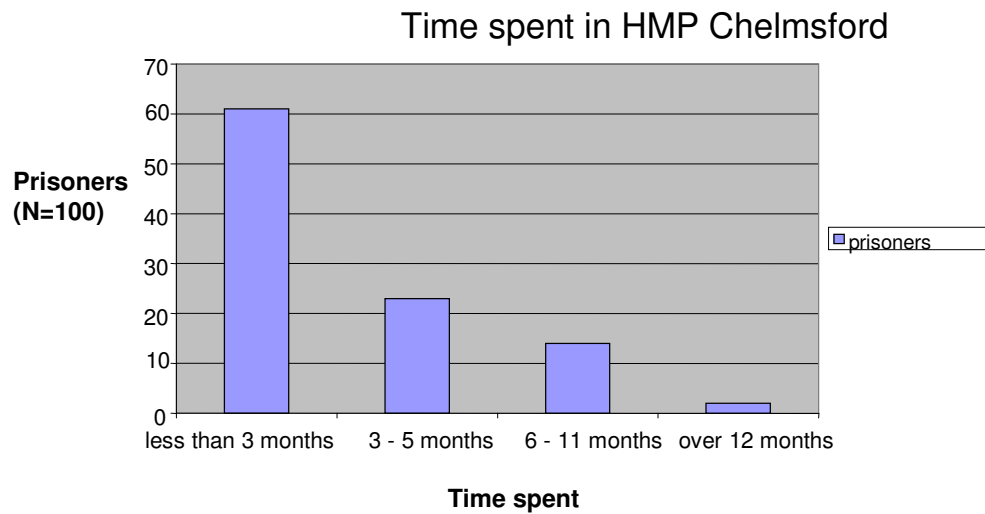
3.0 Profile of the 100 prisoners taking part in the survey

3.1 Status: Adults: 73; Young Offenders: 17; Vulnerable Prisoners: 10.

3.2 Sentencing status: Remand: 31%; sentenced: 62%; convicted/unsentenced: 7%.

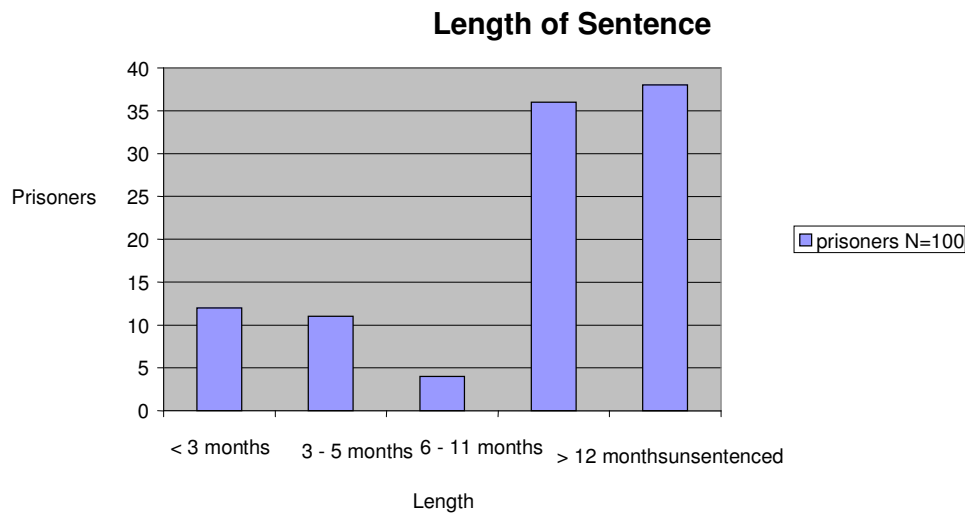
3.3 Time spent in HMP Chelmsford: Being a local prison, 61% had spent 3 months or less in the prison, so some may have had limited experience of visiting facilities, etc.

Fig 1:



3.4 Length of sentence: This may also have a bearing on whether prisoners want their families to visit, or have the opportunity to take up parenting courses or other options.

Fig 2:



3.5 Ethnicity: 60% of prisoners participating classed themselves as white British. 14% were foreign nationals.

4.0 Findings of the Survey

4.1 Parental status

67% said they had at least one child/stepchild under the age of 18 years. 53 (79% of all the fathers) said they were in contact with at least one of their children. However, only 24 of the 53 (45%) said they had visits from their children.

4.2 Prisoners' visits from family and friends

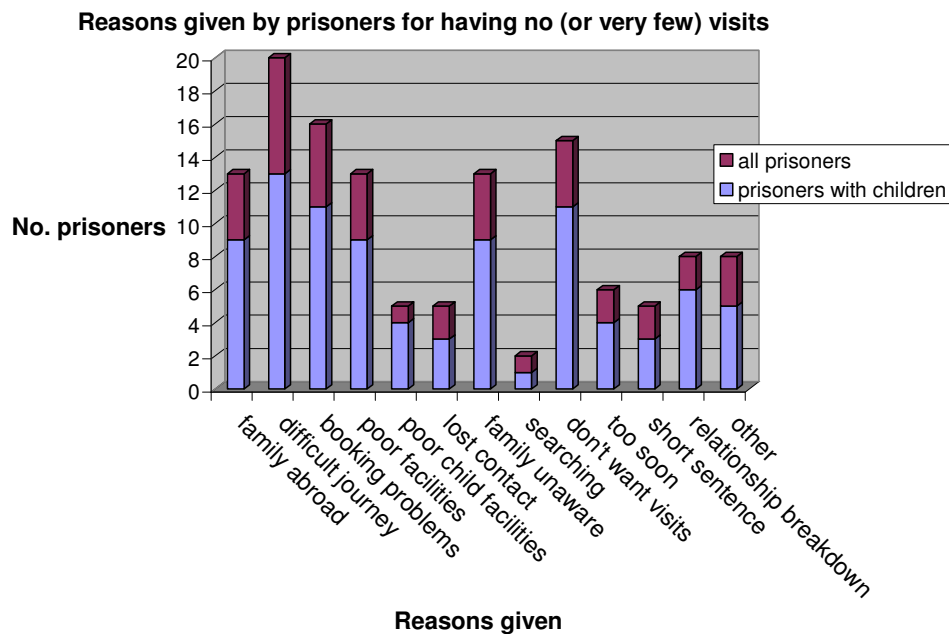
Prisoners were asked who visited them, or if they had no visits, or very few visits, to explain the reasons. Most gave more than one reason. The results are shown in figs 3 and 4.

Fig 3:



- 65% of those receiving no (or very few) visits had spent less than 3 months in HMP Chelmsford. Some of these had not been there long enough to arrange a visit, while some with very short sentences had chosen not to tell their families - especially their children - where they were, or preferred not to burden their families with visiting.
- Of the 23 prisoners who said they received no visits, only 4 were foreign nationals.
- Many of the 14 foreign nationals who took part in the survey said they were unable to have visits from their families living abroad but had occasional visits from friends in the UK.
- Only 24 of the 53 fathers in touch with their children received visits from them.

Fig 4:



- Comments from those whose children did not visit included:

- I told my child I'm working away from home
- My wife doesn't speak English, she can't understand the visiting procedures
- I'm only in touch with my children on the outside - they're too young to visit alone & will need an accompanying adult.
- I don't want the children searched

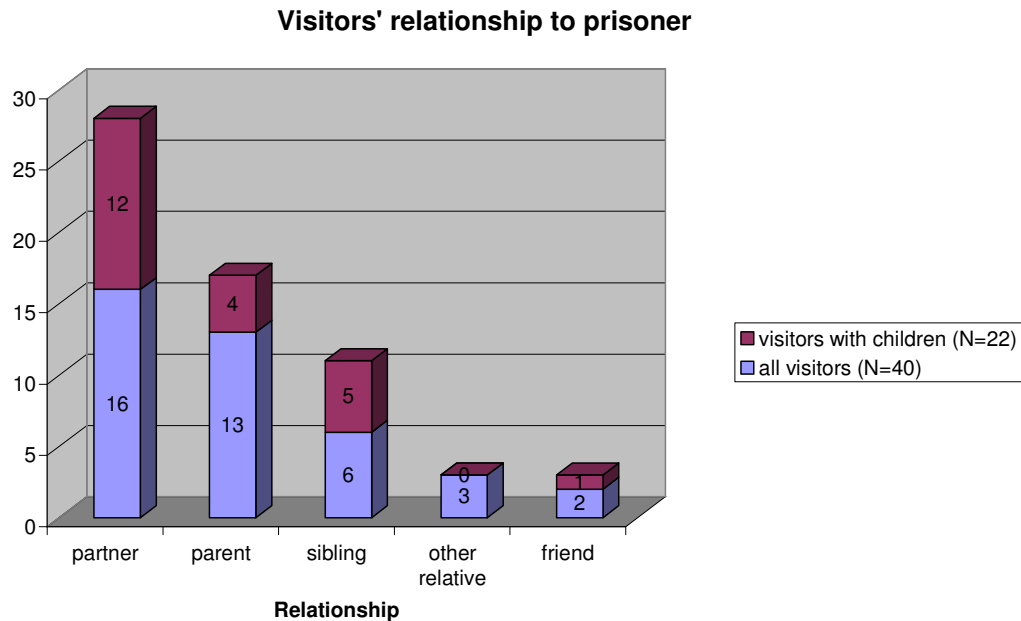
4.2 Families' views about visiting

All those completing the families' questionnaire had either had a previous visit (91%) or were about to experience their first visit. However some said they did not visit often, for a variety of reasons:

- It's too far/too difficult to get there
- Difficulty booking visits
- Searching is a bit degrading, even though I understand why
- I feel you are looked at like a criminal because you're visiting your partner

The breakdown of those completing visitor questionnaires according to their relationship to the prisoner was as follows:

Fig 5:



4.3 Booking visits

Visitors completing questionnaires were asked about their experiences of booking visits. Where difficulties were reported, these tended to fall into two categories. Firstly there were difficulties in getting through to the booking line and secondly, once through, visitors sometimes found that the visiting time of their choice was fully booked. New visitors often found it hard to understand the system of booking a visit.

Only 25% of visitors reported being able to get through to the booking line at the first attempt. Of those saying how many times they had tried before getting through, the average was 6 attempts. Others said they had tried “for hours” or “on and off all day”, or it was “always engaged”.

While obviously a source of some frustration, this response is a marked improvement on the experiences reported by visitors in a similar survey two years ago. Then only 9% of visitors said they got through first time, and reported trying 15 times on average before getting through. Since then, HMP Chelmsford has made considerable effort to address the problem, introducing an additional booking line which is officially open from 08.30 - 19.45 Monday - Friday and 13.30 - 16.30 at weekends. In theory the booking line can now be accessed at virtually any time of day or night. In practice however the prison acknowledges that difficulties do arise when responsibility for the line is transferred to staff who may be involved in other duties which have to take precedence.

“When the line is unmanned, would it be possible to have an answerphone message stating that is the case, so we don't spend unnecessary hours sometimes trying to get through?”

- Visitor

Visitors also reported a wide variation in the attitude and helpfulness of the response they got when they rang the booking line, and this was also observed by the researcher. This is related to the fact that out of office hours, the line is not staffed by the dedicated booking clerks.

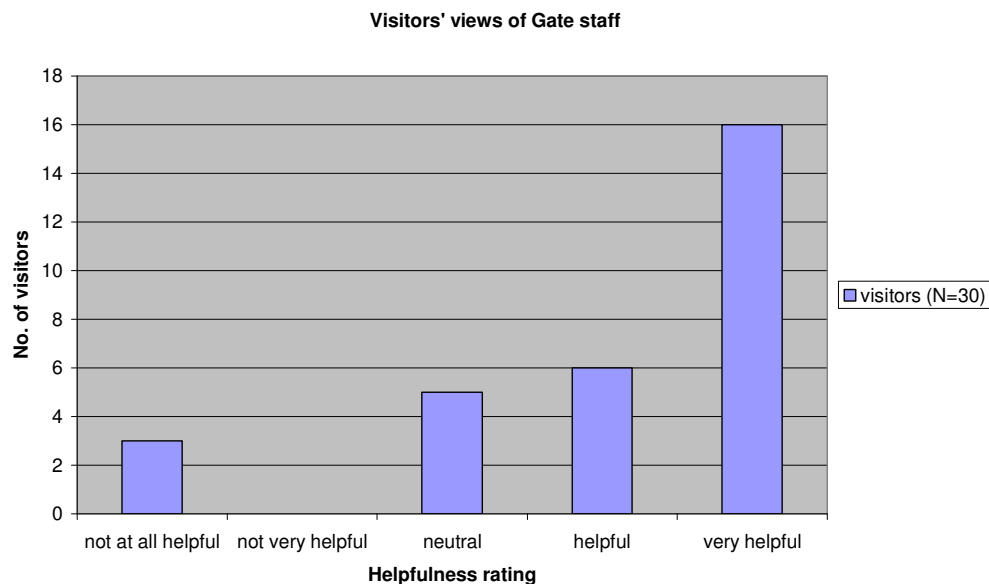
For most visitors, the staff who book visits represent the front line of their contact with the prison, from which they may judge the prison's attitude to visitors as a whole. When staff were able to answer additional questions or refer enquirers to other sources of advice, such as Visitors Centre staff or APVU, this was much appreciated, especially by first time visitors new to the system.

A small investment in 'customer care' training for such staff, to include some awareness of the visitors' perspective and resources such as the freephone Prisoners' Families Helpline, is recommended.

4.4 Getting into the prison

At the time of the 2003 visits survey at HMP Chelmsford, visitors were very critical of the system and facilities for booking in on arrival at the gate. This system has now been changed so that all visitors book in initially at the Visitors Centre, which is open for every visit. This seems to be much appreciated by visitors, who no longer have to wait outside in long queues in all weathers. Visitors' rating of the helpfulness of gate staff was generally very positive:

Fig 6: How helpful did you find prison staff at the gate?



4.5 Visitors Centre

Physical environment

Many changes have been made to the Visitors Centre since 2003. Structurally there have been vast improvements, with running water and toilets installed (instead of portaloos). Visitors can buy drinks and snacks from a tea bar run by the Visitors Centre Coordinator and her volunteers. Nappy changing facilities and a range of toys and play activities and a TV are provided. Visitors say they find the general atmosphere friendly and relaxed - though space is limited and it does get crowded.

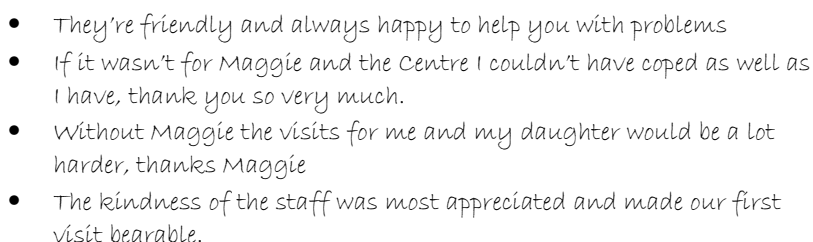
Management

The Visitors Centre is run by HMP Chelmsford and managed by an OSG (Operational Support Grade), Maggie Nash, supported by a number of volunteers. Ormiston Children and Families Trust project staff use office space in the Centre. The Visitors Centre is open before and after every visit. The changes in managerial arrangements for the Centre have had the effect of strengthening links and relationships with the rest of the prison. Together with the presence of Ormiston staff, this appears to have had a very positive impact on the awareness by prison staff of the needs of visitors. There is growing recognition of the importance of families of prisoners in the whole resettlement process.

Funding is being sought to provide additional support to the Coordinator with booking-in, running the tea bar and general management of the Centre. It is also hoped to recruit more volunteers to assist with the running.

Support and information

The provision of a range of information for visitors, together with a welcoming and supportive environment, is seen as a vital part of the Centre's function. Feedback about this from visitors through both the survey and the Comments Book is overwhelmingly positive; typical comments were:

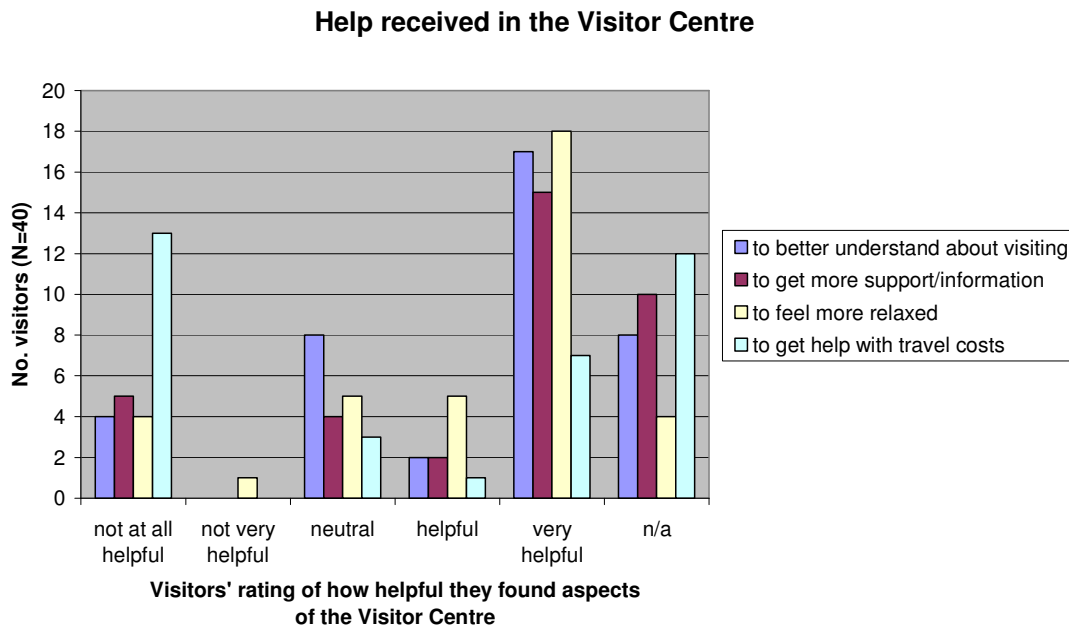
- 
- They're friendly and always happy to help you with problems
 - If it wasn't for Maggie and the Centre I couldn't have coped as well as I have, thank you so very much.
 - Without Maggie the visits for me and my daughter would be a lot harder, thanks Maggie
 - The kindness of the staff was most appreciated and made our first visit bearable.

The visitor questionnaire sought to identify which aspects of the Visitors Centre were particularly helpful. Some responses are ambiguous, making it difficult to determine in some cases whether visitors were: a) unaware of the availability of advice or information, or b) not interested in seeking information, or c) had sought help but felt dissatisfied with the outcome.

A new Visitor Information Pack has recently been introduced for first time visitors. This gives information about the prison system what can be brought in, services for children, etc.

While there is a good range of information available in the form of posters and leaflets in the Centre, it may be possible - given staff or volunteer resources - to be even more proactive in making visitors aware of what is on offer. Nevertheless, the response shown by visitors is very positive on all aspects of the help provided by the Visitors Centre:

Fig. 7:



[See appendix2 (visitors questionnaire) for details of the statements rated.]

4.6 In the Visits Room

Many aspects of the Visits Room were heavily criticised in the 2003 survey - particularly the 'cramped, spartan atmosphere', inadequate vending machines and limited facilities for children. Major efforts are being made by the prison to address these issues but some of these have not yet come to fruition in the short term.

Attempts have been made in the short-term to address the problem of the demand for visits exceeding capacity. Firstly, the number of visits sessions has been increased and now includes one evening visit a week, which is popular with most visitors.

Secondly, the existing Visits Room is small and cramped for the number of visitors using it. In order to increase the number of tables available, a decision was taken to remove the play area. A lack of staffing had previously meant this was not open at weekends, when many family visits take place, anyway. Visits staff attempt to make the best of this situation by providing some toys, and showed awareness of the health and safety issues around such provision, but the present facilities leave much to be desired for children visiting:

- *There's not enough for kids to do, makes visiting stressful*
- *They expect kids to just sit down, but there's not enough high chairs or toys to keep them in place*

The provision of a play area for children in the new-build Visits Room is strongly recommended. The organisation KIDS VIP provides free training and advice in the setting up of a prison play area.

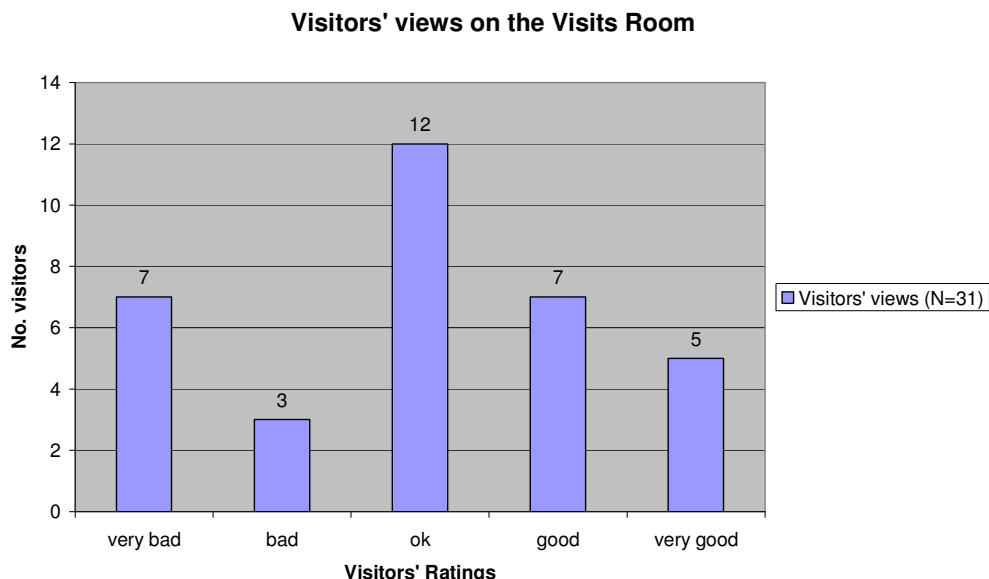
The provision of a tea bar in the Visits Room, which is run by Visitors Centre staff, is greatly appreciated. This offers drinks, chocolate, crisps, fruit, cuppa soup, etc. Unfortunately it is difficult to staff this for all visits however, and the vending machines which are used at other times attracted just as much criticism as in the last survey - stocks run out, visitors lose money in them and one visitor complained she got soup when she expected coffee!

More volunteers have recently been recruited to run the tea bar, so it is hoped to be able to increase the sessions when it is open.

No complaints were made this time however about hygiene, and both the researcher and visitors found the room clean.

Overall, visitors' feelings about the current facilities in the Visits Room were mixed:

Fig 8:



Several prisoners made comparisons with the facilities at other prisons, notably HMP Wayland, referring to soft chairs, coffee tables, bright colours and a relaxed atmosphere.

Substantial new-build visitor facilities costing £19.8 million have been planned and building work has started. Completion is expected in around two years. The suite will provide a new Visitors Centre and new Visits Room with greater capacity to accommodate the prison population of Chelmsford. An area for video links will be included. A tea bar and a children's play area is planned.

These developments should greatly improve facilities for prisoners and families trying to maintain relationships and help to encourage contact. It is strongly recommended that visitors themselves, and organisations working to strengthen family ties among prisoners, are consulted as much as possible as the facilities are developed.

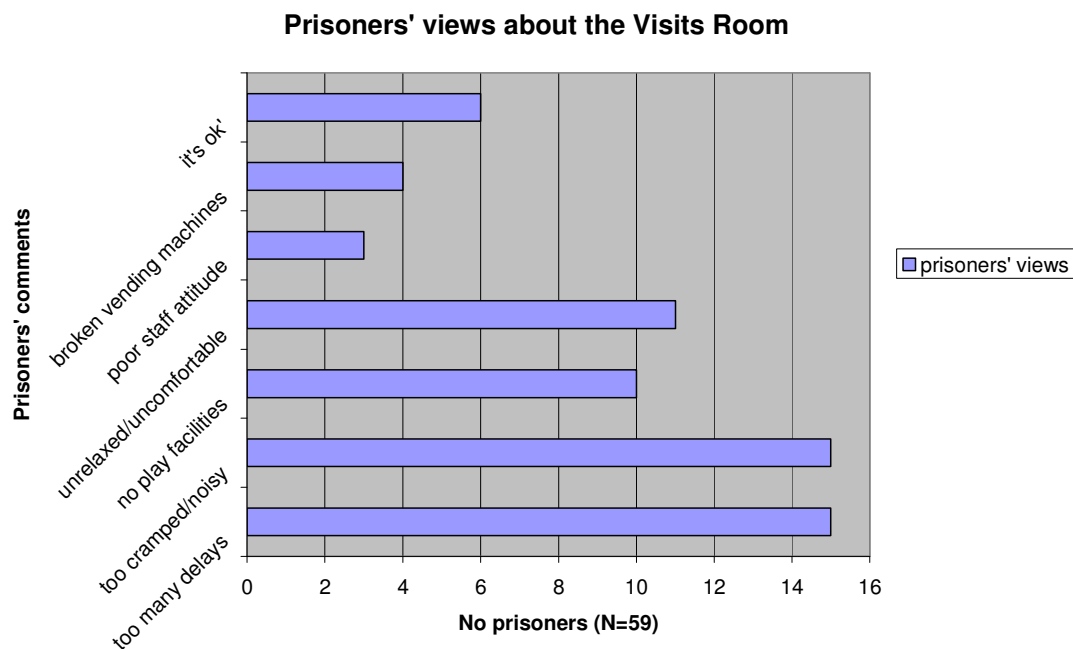
4.7 Punctuality of visits

In the Visitors Centre Comments Book there were 19 entries referring to delays in starting visits on time. Similar comments were made in 15 prisoners' questionnaires, for example:

- *It takes a long time to process visitors and time is taken off the visit*
- *visits are always delayed - they should get the prisoners in before the visitors*
- *very long waits every week so you only get an hour instead of 2 hours*

Given the high number of complaints on this issue, it would be helpful for the process of getting visitors in on time to be monitored to see if improvements could be made. However there may be different expectations by the prison and by visitors about how long visits should be. For example, convicted prisoners are entitled to a minimum visit of one hour, but many visit sessions are advertised as two hour sessions, leaving visitors feeling aggrieved if they do not get the full two hours. While longer visiting hours are generally conducive to facilitating family ties and to be encouraged, it might be helpful for visitors to be given clearer guidance about the expected length of visits if it is not considered feasible by the prison for all visits to achieve the full two hours.

A breakdown of comments by prisoners about the visits facilities generally is shown in Fig. 9:



4.8 Children's Visits

In October 2004 Ormiston Children and Families Trust introduced monthly Children's Visits. These visits offer fathers an opportunity to focus on their children's needs through a two hour visit in the sports hall where they are free to move around and play with their children in a relaxed environment. Toys, games and activities are provided and tea is served during the visit.

Fathers/stepfathers who have been in HMP Chelmsford for four weeks or more can apply for a Children's Visit. Applications are then subject to security criteria. Children must be 16 or under, and can be accompanied by only one adult per family. This helps make the child the centre of attention of the visit and fulfil one of the aims of Ormiston's work - "to enable children to maintain relationships and regular contact with an imprisoned parent/carer." Fathers are encouraged to take responsibility for their children.

The visits are popular with prisoners, children and families, the main frustrations being limitations on their availability and length. Ormiston staff seek regular feedback from children and adults taking part in Children's Visits, as shown:

What do you like about Children's Visits?

- Very good, lots of toys and things to do for the children. Happy & friendly atmosphere.
- Great for the kids getting time to play with their dads.
- The idea of food & photos is great
- My children enjoy themselves a lot & it's nice to see them playing with their dad after so long.
- My daughter loved it! She's disappointed she's not on the next one.

- I like the Children's Visits because you can run around with your dad and you're never bored and daddy can join in too.
- I like giving daddy cuddles and playing with lots of toys

What don't you like about Children's Visits?

- Leaving daddy
- More of them would be nice
- Have to be here 28 days before you can get one

Feedback about Children's Visits from prison staff, including the Governor, has generally been very positive. Some concerns were expressed about the visits providing easy opportunities for passing drugs, but there has been no direct evidence of this. Wing staff felt that the visits often had a calming influence on the men and that it encouraged them to face up to the impact of their imprisonment on their children.

Of the 21 families with children who responded to the questionnaire, nine said they did not know about Children's Visits. Whilst the onus is deliberately placed on the *prisoner* to apply for Children's Visits, families indicated that they would like more information about such facilities, so that they could discuss the option with the fathers.

4.9 Other ways of keeping in touch

Letters

Keeping in touch through letters is an important method of contact for 86% of the prisoners surveyed, especially for those receiving few visits. Of the fathers who do not have visits from their children, almost all keep in touch via letters and phone calls.

Nearly half the sample found that the mail system usually worked well for them. This compares with less than a quarter in the 2003 survey, so a marked improvement can be seen. This may be a reflection of the fact that a dedicated correspondence team has now been put in place, reducing the incidence of lost letters, etc.

Just over half the prisoners said their letters were sometimes delayed. This may be due to normal security processes or delays beyond the prison's control, but given the high number of prisoners raising the issue, some monitoring of the system may be required.

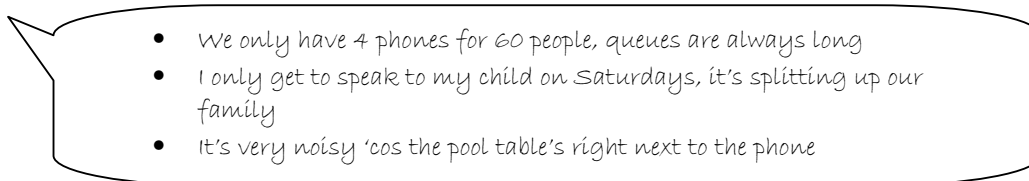
A small number of prisoners said they would welcome help with writing letters. Provision of such help is an area which deserves further consideration in the interests of encouraging family ties - who could provide help and how might it be offered?

Telephone calls

Most prisoners (88%) said they use the telephone to keep in touch. However, only 23% of those surveyed were happy with the system (11% in 2003). The biggest complaint was 'long queues for the phone' (raised by 68% of the total sample - the same percentage as in 2003 - and by 90% of all the VPs sampled).

Associated with this problem was the issue of prisoners not being able to access phones at the times they wanted to ring their families (49%). Employed prisoners have less access during the day than others. This is a particular problem for fathers wanting to contact their children in the small window of opportunity between school and bedtimes. The lack of telephones also causes pressure on staff from frustrated prisoners who feel they need to make urgent calls.

Comments from prisoners included:

- 
- We only have 4 phones for 60 people, queues are always long
 - I only get to speak to my child on Saturdays, it's splitting up our family
 - It's very noisy 'cos the pool table's right next to the phone

53% of prisoners also complained about the high cost of telephoning from prison, especially for calls abroad. It is noted that the prison is very aware of these concerns, and calls made at any time of the day are charged at evening rates. More telephones would help ease these problems, although the prison reported that six additional phones have recently been installed on the wings and in workshops.

Complaints about noise and lack of privacy have reduced now that all phones have hoods, but some phones are said to be situated in noisy areas such as beside pool tables.

Tapes

Many prisons have now introduced a facility for fathers to make audio storytapes to send out to their children (eg HMP Dartmoor's 'Storybook Dads' scheme). This is not as yet in operation at HMP Chelmsford but would be another constructive option for prisoners to strengthen ties with their children.

Homework Club

At the time of the survey, HMP Chelmsford was about to launch a Homework Club, along the lines of a similar scheme pioneered by HMP Wormwood Scrubs. This will be run in

cooperation with the Education Department and the Visitors Centre and cater for about six prisoners and their children. Children will spend an hour with their fathers with a volunteer and teacher present with the aim of promoting learning and strengthening family ties.

Only a handful of prisoners surveyed said they had heard of the scheme but over a third of those in contact with their children were keen to find out more about it.

4.10 Services for prisoners and their children

Parenting programmes

HMP Chelmsford have been successfully running 'Fathers Inside', a 3 week accredited parenting course provided by Safe Ground and the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit. This uses a drama and storytelling approach and encourages prisoners to identify and apply their parenting responsibilities from prison.

More recently an accredited parenting programme, 'You and Your Child' has also been offered by Ormiston Children and Families Trust. The course uses learning, homework, games, art and craft, with modules on play and development, distance and communication, and health and safety.

The survey sought to explore prisoners' awareness of and interest in these courses and to find out what makes some fathers apply for the courses but not others. Only a very small number of those surveyed had taken part in either of these courses, but about a quarter said they would like more information about them.

Analysis of the reasons given for *not* choosing to take up one or other of these courses revealed a number of common themes. The replies relating to each individual course were similar, suggesting that it was general issues about parenting courses, rather than aspects of a specific course, on which prisoners were making their decisions.

Several fathers gave practical reasons why they had not applied for courses - they were only serving short sentences or their children were adult or did not fit the age criteria. Some fathers excluded themselves because their children lived abroad or because they were estranged from them. The other main category was those who felt they were good parents already and did not need a course. A sample of comments is given:

Why did you choose not to do a course at this time?

- *My parenting skills are ok, I'm quite capable*
- *I'm a pretty good parent when I'm not in prison*
- *'Cos I'm not allowed to see my kids*
- *I don't want to discuss my family business with others (re 'You & Your Child')*
- *It's all plays and role play - I don't feel I'd achieve anything (re 'Fathers Inside')*
- *It's difficult enough being here without having to think about those things.*

Services provided by Ormiston Children and Families Trust

Apart from running Children's Visits and the 'You and Your Child' course at HMP Chelmsford, Ormiston staff based in the prison can provide information, advice and support on a range of issues concerning children and families. A community project run by Ormiston in Essex,

'Time for Children & Young People' also offers one-to-one support and group activities for 5 - 13 year olds with a relative in prison.

Links between the prison based staff and the community based worker facilitate family liaison work. Their key aims are to help maintain and strengthen family relationships and assist in the successful reintegration of prisoners back into the family unit.

Only a small number of prisoners said they were aware of the family support offered by Ormiston (7% of the total sample; 13% of those with children with whom they had some contact). However a quarter of all prisoners were interested in finding out more about this.

Just under a quarter of the sample had heard of Ormiston Children and Families Trust, though this rose to 30% of all those in touch with their children. Most of these associated Ormiston with Children's Visits but were unaware of other services which were available. One had heard of Ormiston at another prison and commented that they were a well respected organisation.

A similar picture was found amongst visitors responding to the survey. Only 5 out of the total of 21 respondents with children said they had heard of Ormiston Children and Families Trust and these were families who had taken part in Children's Visits. Several families who had heard about Children's Visits did not seem to be aware of the organisation.

The prison is aware of the problems associated with trying to get large amounts of information to prisoners through induction. In order to address this there are plans to introduce an information channel to link into the TV in every prisoner's cell. A wide range of information - including services for fathers and families, parenting courses, etc can then be given via a visual presentation on a loop system which can be repeated as often as required. This should go a long way towards addressing the problems of raising awareness of support which is on offer.

4.11 Other comments by prisoners concerning family ties

Apart from the issues raised elsewhere in this report, prisoners expressed views or suggestions about other ways in which ties between prisoners and their families could be enhanced.

Foreign nationals

There was particular concern expressed by several foreign nationals about their specific difficulties in keeping contact with their families. They would welcome any advice or support about how to maintain their ties when their families were unable to visit, such as any financial help with travel or telephone costs or about provision for overnight stays, 'back to back' visits, etc.

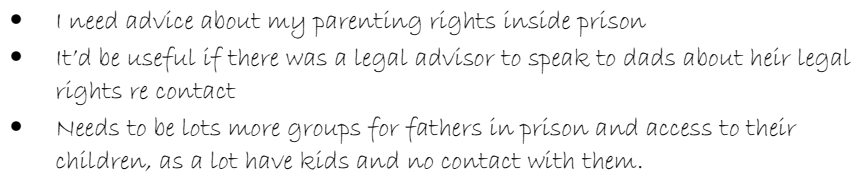
It was also pointed out that not only do many foreign nationals have difficulty with the language and literacy in prison, but their families also struggle to understand prison procedures and how to keep in touch.

A new post of Foreign Nationals Co-ordinator has just been appointed.

Child contact issues

Several prisoners raised concerns about difficulties in maintaining contact with their children, especially when the relationship with the child's mother had broken down. They felt very helpless to do anything about the situation whilst in prison and feared that they

would lose all contact with their children. They also wanted information about their legal rights and where to get help:

- 
- I need advice about my parenting rights inside prison
 - It'd be useful if there was a legal advisor to speak to dads about heir legal rights re contact
 - Needs to be lots more groups for fathers in prison and access to their children, as a lot have kids and no contact with them.

Brickbats and bouquets

Whilst it is always easier to highlight areas for improvement, this survey also identified many positive comments. One prisoner commented that 'if you have any problems, you can always talk to the chaplaincy who do a very good job'. Those who had had Children's Visits were universally enthusiastic about them ('What could be improved about them?' 'Nothing - they're great!'). And finally, a great many visitors praised the kindness and friendliness of staff in the Visitors Centre, who made their visits to the prison 'much more bearable'.

5.0 Summary of Progress on Recommendations from the 2003 survey Report

This section describes how far the recommendations from the 2003 report have been taken forward and summarises the changes that have taken place since that time, as described in greater detail in the main section of this report.

1. *Booking line:*

Either the opening hours of the booking line need to be significantly extended, and/or a second telephone line should be made available.

Both of these recommendations have been implemented, resulting in a decrease in difficulty reported by visitors trying to get through. There is room for further improvement however. (see 4.3)

2. *Booking-in / Gate facilities:*

The booking-in system needs a complete overhaul. Moving it into the Visitor Centre would overcome many of these problems and encourage better use of the Visitor Centre.

This has been very successfully implemented. (see 4.4)

3. *Visitor Centre:*

Move the booking-in desk into the Visitor Centre. Install mains water and toilets. Extend opening hours to cover all visits. Ensure visitors with disabilities are catered for. Advertise its presence to visitors more clearly.

This has been very successfully implemented. (see 4.5)

4. *Visits Room:*

- *Consider enlarging or relocating the Visits Room to larger premises to enable more visits, and better quality visits, to take place.*
 - *Consider replacing vending machines with canteen. Alternatively, ensure clear responsibility is taken for keeping vending machines clean, fully stocked and maintained in working order.*
 - *Ensure floor and tables and play area are kept clean at all times.*
 - *Review the needs of disabled visitors, eg rails beside the x-ray machine to assist those with crutches or poor mobility; access to toilets before and during visits.*
- The over-crowded Visits Room remains a problem, but plans to increase capacity with a substantial building programme of new visitor accommodation are well advanced.
 - A new canteen has been established in the Visits Room and is much appreciated. However it has not been possible to staff this for every visit and when the vending machines are used instead, users report that they frequently malfunction.
 - Cleanliness in the Visits Room appears to have improved and is no longer a source of complaints by users. (see 4.6)
 - No action has been taken to install rails; access to toilets before and after visits is possible, but not easy in a cluttered space. This needs further consideration.

5. *Play area in Visits Room:*

- *Extend the times when it is staffed, especially for weekend visits;*
- *Consider redecoration / updating*

The play area has been removed to create greater capacity for visits. Some provision has been made for children but this is far from ideal.

6. *Vulnerable prisoners (VPs):*

- *Either arrange visits for VPs at separate times, or ensure that staff take steps to protect both visitors and prisoners from intimidation and abuse during visits. Any changes should not discriminate against the families of VPs, who are the innocent parties.*
- *Consider the rights of non-sex offenders on the VPs unit to participate in parenting classes and Children's Visits.*
- Prison managers report that this has been addressed; visits are integrated but staff exercise tighter control. This issue was not raised by any prisoners or visitors in this survey.
- Provision of parenting courses and Children's Visits, where appropriate, for families of Vulnerable Prisoners is under consideration.

7. *Letters and telephones:*

- *Review the systems for dealing with both incoming and outgoing mail in order to reduce delays.*
- *Substantially more telephones should be provided on Wings and situated where noise and lack of privacy can be minimised. Prisoners should be allowed more flexibility of time to access telephones, and ways of achieving a fairer distribution of access to telephones between prisoners should be considered to reduce bullying.*
- *Consider improving facilities for families to contact a prisoner or prison staff in cases of emergency. An answer-phone service for families contacting the prison would be welcomed, providing it could be adequately resourced to ensure that messages were acknowledged and responded to appropriately.*
- Increased satisfaction (from 23% to 42%) with the mail service was reported, although there is room for further improvement. A dedicated correspondence team has been introduced which is reported to have led to a decrease in lost mail.
- Six additional telephones have been installed on wings and all phones now have hoods. Access to phones has been increased, but 68% of prisoners still report long queues for phones. (see 4.9)
- Provision of an answer-phone for families, which was raised as a possibility by a previous Governor, has not been considered viable. However families with concerns about a prisoner can telephone the chaplaincy, the Visitors Centre or the Safer Custody helpline.

8. *Children's Needs:*

- *It would be very desirable to increase staffing resources to permit more parenting classes and more Children's Visits to take place.*
- *Appointing a family liaison worker would help to deal with complex issues relating to family contact, to the benefit of both prisoners and families.*
- *Consider enabling fathers to make story-tapes to send to their children.*

- Ormiston Time for Families at HMP Chelmsford (see 4.8) now provides monthly Children's Visits, which are very popular, and has introduced a new parenting programme, 'You and Your Child'. This runs in addition to 'Fathers Inside', giving increased availability and choice of parenting education.
- Ormiston staff offer a family liaison service, in conjunction with a community post in Essex for children and young people with a parent in prison. Increased publicity for these services is recommended. (see 4.10)
- Introduction of the 'Storybook Dads' scheme (or similar) at HMP Chelmsford has not yet been implemented.

9. Raising staff awareness:

Consider training for prison staff at all levels to raise awareness of the needs and rights of prisoners' families.

This has not been formally implemented, though the presence of the Ormiston project, together with stronger links between the prison and the Visitors Centre and considerable commitment from Resettlement, has helped to raise the profile of families. The Visitors Centre Co-ordinator plans to arrange training through KIDS VIP to support the establishment of facilities for children in the new visitor suite.

6.0 Conclusion

Provision for family ties in HMP Chelmsford has improved significantly over the last couple of years. The establishment of a new Ormiston Time for Families project in the prison has enabled regular Children's Visits, family liaison and a new parenting education programme to be introduced. Substantial investment in the Visitors Centre, together with new management arrangements, has produced a much improved environment for visitors, which is much appreciated by them.

Despite the fact that HMP Chelmsford is a local prison, where resettlement issues might be expected to assume a low priority generally, Resettlement appears to have developed a stronger profile over the last couple of years, with new initiatives such as the Homework Club and a strong commitment to helping prisoners to maintain their family ties.

At all levels in the prison there is evidence of an increased awareness of the importance of families, both in terms of the needs of children in their own right and the important role which family ties play in successful resettlement.

The recommendations of the 2003 survey have been met to a very large degree, as seen below. There is still scope for further improvement in some areas, notably the cramped conditions in the visits room, but the new building programme should make a big improvement in this area.

7.0 Recommendations for future action



1. The provision of good quality play facilities for children in the new-build Visits Room is strongly recommended.
2. Families, and those working directly with them, should be included in all consultations about the development of new visitor facilities.
3. Some 'customer care' training for any staff who may be involved in booking visits, to include some awareness of the visitors' perspective and resources such as the Prisoners' Families Helpline, is recommended.
4. If vending machines continue to be used in the visits room when the tea bar cannot be staffed, they should be maintained in good working order.
5. Ormiston staff should consider ways of increasing awareness of their services to prisoners and families.
6. Introduction of the 'Storybook Dads' scheme (or similar) for prisoners who wish to make story tapes for their children is encouraged.

Appendix 1

Visits survey - Prisoners

SUMMARY

1.	Are you:	Adult	YP	VP
2.	Are you:	Remand	Convicted	
		Sentenced	Unsentenced	
3.	How long have you been in HMP Chelmsford?			
4.	How long is your sentence? (if sentenced)			
5.	What is your ethnic origin?			
6.	Are you a Foreign National?			
7.	Do you have any children/step-children aged under 18?			
8.	If yes, are you in contact with at least one of them?			
9.	Who visits you? (tick all that apply)			
	Parents		Children	
	Partner		Brother/Sister	
	Other relatives		Friends	
	Lawyer		Other _____	
	Nobody			
10.	If you <u>don't</u> have visits, (or only have very occasional visits) could you tell us why? (tick all that apply)			
	i) My family live out of the country			
	ii) The journey is too difficult/expensive			
	iii) Difficulty booking a visit			
	iv) The facilities are poor			
	v) Lack of provision for children			
	vi) Not in touch with my family			
	vii) My family don't know I'm here			
	viii) Searching puts people off			

ix) I don't want my family to come here
x) Other reasons (please tell us) _____
11. Besides visits, how else do you keep in touch with family & friends?
Letters Telephone calls Tapes
I don't keep in touch
12.  Keeping in touch by letter: Which of these applies to you?
The mail system usually works well
I find writing difficult
My letters are sometimes delayed
I'd like help with writing letters
13.  Keeping in touch by telephone: Which of these applies to you?
I don't usually have any problems with phoning
It's too noisy
It's too expensive
Too little privacy
Long queues for the phone
Can't phone at the times I want
14. Could you please tell us, on a scale of 1 - 5, how you feel about the Visits Room:
Very unsatisfactory 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfactory. Not applicable
Are there any comments you would like to make about the visits room?
Ormiston Children and Families Trust
15. This survey has been organised by Ormiston Children and Families Trust. Had you heard of them before?
Children's Visits (special visits where Dads can move around and play with their children):
16a. Have you ever taken part in a Children's Visit at this prison?
16b. If yes, what was the best thing about the visit?
16c. What could be improved?
16d. How do you think the visit has affected your children?
16e. If No, would you like more information about Children's Visits?

17. 'You & Your Child' parenting courses (for parents of children up to 12 years old)

17a. Have you ever taken part in this course?

17b. Would you like more information about taking part in this course?

17c. If no - it would help us to understand why some Dads choose this course and not others. Can you tell us why you were not interested at this time?

18. 'Fathers Inside' courses

18a. Have you ever taken part in this course?

18b. Would you like more information about taking part in this course?

18c. If no - it would help us to understand why some Dads choose this course and not others. Can you tell us why you were not interested at this time?

20. Homework Club (a weekly after-school session to be started soon for Dads and their children aged 5-14)

20a. Have you heard about this?

20b. Would you like more information about taking part in the Homework Club?

21. 'Time for children and young people in Essex' - an Ormiston project offering one-to-one support or group activities for 5-13 year olds living in Essex who have a relative in prison.

21a. Have you heard about this?

21b. Would you like more information about this?

22. Family support and information - Ormiston staff in the prison can provide information, advice and support about a range of children and family matters.

22a. Have you heard about this?

22b. Would you like more information about this?

23. Would you like to add any other comments or suggestions about keeping in touch with family and friends at HMP Chelmsford?

8. Visitors Centre

Could you please tell us, on a scale of 1 – 5, whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

The Visitors Centre has helped me:

a. To better understand about visiting the prison & staying in touch

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree Not applicable *(please circle)*

b. To know where I can go if I need more support or information

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree Not applicable *(please circle)*

c. To feel more relaxed before a visit

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree Not applicable *(please circle)*

d. To find out how to get help with travel costs

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree Not applicable *(please circle)*

Are there any comments you would like to make about the Visitors Centre ?

9. The Visits Room

Could you please tell us, on a scale of 1 - 5, how you feel about the Visits Room:

Very unsatisfactory 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfactory. Not applicable *(please circle)*

Are there any comments you would like to make about the visits room?

Ormiston Children and Families Trust

10. This survey has been organised by Ormiston Children and Families Trust. Had you heard of them before?

11. If yes, did you know that they provide:

a) Children's Visits? Yes No

b) 'You & Your Child' parenting courses? Yes No

c) Family information & support? Yes No

If you would like more information about any of these services, including a project to support 5 -13 year olds living in Essex with a relative in prison - please telephone: Tina Harburn Ormiston Project Leader on 01245 272260, or ask staff in the Visitors Centre.

12. Children's Visits

In addition to ordinary social visits, prisoners can apply for 'children's visits' where they can move around and play with their children. If you have children, have you been to a children's visit?

Yes (*please go to question 13*)

Not applicable - don't have children (*please go to question 14*)

No, I didn't know about them (*please go to question 14*)

No, but their father has applied for one (*please go to question 14*)

No, our application was turned down (*please go to question 14*)

No, for other reasons (please tell us): __

13a If you've had a Children's Visit, what was the best thing about the visit?

13b. What could be improved?

13c. How do you think the visit has affected your children?

14. Finally please, what is your ethnic origin?

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