



Independent Monitoring Boards Secretariat
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Mark Leech

By Email

20 November 2017

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter on my appointment as National Chair for IMBs.

I was surprised at your comments about my time as Chief Inspector. I frequently spoke out about conditions in prisons and the treatment of prisoners, and defended the independence of the inspectorate from attempts to align it to the standards of the prison service, or indeed to abolish a separate prisons inspectorate altogether. You very kindly dedicated the 2011 Prisons Handbook to me at the end of my term as Chief Inspector.

Prisons have sadly deteriorated since then. So, it remains vital that independent oversight is able to record what is actually happening, and I want to support IMBs in being able to do this, with their unique perspective and access.

I am, of course, aware of the circumstances around the tragic death of Colin Bell – as you may know, the inspection that I jointly led into Maghaberry in the year after his death was extremely critical of the poor standard of suicide prevention and safety in general in the prison. However, my role now does not cover Northern Ireland, whose IMBs are legally separate and under a different governance structure from England and Wales. So you may wish to raise your concerns with the Secretariat for the Northern Irish IMBs at imbsecretariat@dojni.x.gsi.gov.uk.

I would be very happy to meet you in person and discuss your concerns and your thoughts on the role of IMBs.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Anne Owers'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dame Anne Owers

IMB National Chair