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Comments: Regarding the prison board of visitors:

I write as a former BBC home affairs correspondent for the southwest region, based in Plymouth, but now living in Jersey. During that time I visited all seven prisons (including HMP Weare, which no longer exists) in Devon and Dorset and had not infrequent dealings with the chair or vice-chair of most of the BoVs (Boards of Visitors), usually with a view to broadcasting items about matters of concern or interest. Incidentally during my time as Home Affairs Correspondent I did visit Jersey on a handful of occasions and although some of the story-lines did involve La Moye I never managed to get inside.

Of all the various home office departments and their adjuncts with which I dealt I found HM Prison Service to be one of the more open to scrutiny. I feel that one of the reasons for that was that the BoVs were on the whole active in tackling their remit and prepared to be seen to be doing so (unlike, for instance, Community Health Councils and their successors vis- -vis the NHS). So issues like over-crowding, suicide, education, the prison regimes, recidivism and pre-release preparation were all subjects that could be discussed and put in front of the public at large.

The members of the Boards of Visitors were for the most part what I would recognise as establishment figures the chair was invariably a retired colonel. But for the most part they seemed to undertake their responsibilities diligently and where they felt the prison service was not coming up to their expectations they were prepared to put the issue in front of the court of public opinion. The prison inmates I met, or at least of those prepared to advance an opinion on the subject, were generally supportive of their role. I would think that they would be deeply suspicious of any attempt to replace the current system with anything based on the Jersey model.

I have been resident in Jersey for just over a year - clearly not long enough to form an opinion on how the system works here. Though I am not aware of any Jurats publically addressing any issues emanating from La Moye thus far. I have however come across the expression, only in Jersey ... far too frequently. Sometimes it reflects the eccentric and wonderful, sometimes it seems to stem from an out-dated, almost feudal, way of doing things which exists through stasis rather than due consideration or principle. However diligent the Jurats may be and that is a fundamental question for which I doubt there is an answer - how can they be seen to be independent, given their involvement deep inside the justice system?

I am convinced BoVs play an important and positive role within prisons, but far more so if the right people are involved. In my opinion that would involve a balanced cross-section of the public from all walks of life bringing into play different abilities, experiences and backgrounds including possibly one Jurat!