



Annual Report HMP Thameside

27 March 2012 – 30 June 2013



Section 1

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

- 1.1 The Prison Act 1952 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 require every prison and IRC to be monitored by an independent Board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison or centre is situated.
- 1.2 The Board is specifically charged to:
 - (1) satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
 - (2) inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
 - (3) **report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.**
- 1.3 To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

Section 2

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Section 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

- 3.1 HMP Thameside is a category B Local prison. It is a new build, managed under contract by Serco Group plc, which accepted its first handful of prisoners on 27 March 2012. It has a baseline Certificate of Normal Accommodation (CNA) of 600, and an in use Operational Capacity (Op Cap) of 900. It has been operating at close to its Op Cap since September 2012, and on 28 June 2013 it held 831 prisoners (684 adult, 147 young offenders). Of this total, 144 were foreign nationals.
- 3.2 Accommodation comprises ten similar units of 59 cells. Apart from ten single cells with disabled access, they contain two bunks. All have integrated toilets and showers, a telephone, and in-cell information technology for communication within the prison. Prisoners can chose to pay for access to a limited number of television channels. There is a Care and Separation Unit with 20 cells and a Healthcare Unit with 18 cells for in-patients as well as surgeries (including dentistry) for outpatient consultations.
- 3.3 The prison contains a well-equipped gymnasium, a football pitch with an all-weather surface, a library, an education centre with six classrooms, a multi faith centre and a laundry. There is a large hall for visits with good facilities for visiting children.
- 3.4 Working with Serco to deliver an offender management service are its two partner agencies, Catch 22 (behaviour management and liaison with external services such as probation) and Turning Point (issues arising from drug and alcohol misuse). The Prison Service has contracted education provision to A4E, and career information and advice to Prospects. Health services have been contracted to Care UK. The escort contractor is Serco Wincanton.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 4.1 HMP Thameside is a new prison and this report covers its first 15 months of operation (27 March 2012 to 30 June 2013). Members of the Board have visited the prison at least twice a week throughout this period. New prisons are not born fully formed and the Board has observed many changes taking place throughout the reporting period. Some areas of work have developed more rapidly than others but considerable progress has been made on all fronts.
- 4.2 It probably takes two years for a new prison to commission and refine all its systems and processes so this report comes at about the halfway point for HMP Thameside. It is perhaps inevitable that a new prison should be monitored especially closely to ensure that it is developing well but there have been several times during the reporting year when it has felt that provision was being 'audited to death', to the point that the Board has been concerned not to add to the pressures by raising additional monitoring issues. It would not have served the interests of the prisoners had we done so.
- 4.3 In the judgement of the Board, the prison made good progress during the reporting period. The Director and his staff know that they still have a considerable way to go and show no sign of slackening in their efforts or ambition. By 30 June 2013 much had been achieved and much remained to be achieved.
- 4.3.1 The prison is secure. Prisoners are treated decently and fed well. Generally they feel safe. When they are sick they are cared for. The gym is a good and well-used facility. Ways to confront and manage a gang-member mindset, common in young offenders and some adults, are being thoughtfully worked out and HMP Thameside is probably ahead other prisons in this area of work. Chaplains provide good support for non-believers as well as believers. Prisoners are helped to confront drug and alcohol dependence (but not yet tobacco) and over 80 per cent of convicted prisoners have housing arranged for them on their release. Most personal relationships are good.
- 4.3.2 Newly trained staff lack breadth of experience and some lack confidence. Staff turnover has been significant – some people who had not worked in a custodial environment before discovered it was not for them. Incidents leading to the unplanned use of force occur too frequently. Arrangements for working with prisoners to provide purposeful activity, reduce reoffending and prepare them for release are not well developed. Arrangements to communicate with prisoners who do not use English fluently need to improve. Not all the lessons from experience get embedded so errors are sometimes unnecessarily repeated. Some IT systems still involve inefficient duplication.
- 4.4 Overall, the Board believes that HMP Thameside is on the right road to becoming a good prison.

Particular issues requiring a response from the Minister.

- 4.5 What steps are being taken to eliminate the unfair and inhumane practice of detaining individuals with foreign nationality in prison following completion of their sentence? (paragraphs 5.9 and 5.10, page 7)
- 4.6 What steps are being taken to ensure that prisoners with serious mental illnesses are accommodated *only* in properly equipped and staffed hospitals and *not* in a prison's healthcare facility? (paragraphs 5.25 and 5.26, page 10)

Particular issues requiring a response from the Prison Service.

- 4.7 What steps are being taken to develop and improve the structuring and management of contracts for services within prisons so that liaison between different providers is straightforward and there is a fair system for resolving difficulties and differences promptly? (paragraphs 5.12, 5.18, 5.19 and 5.24, pages 7, 8, 9 and 10)

Particular issues requiring a response from the Director of HMP Thameside.

- 4.8 How will the prison work to enable all prisoners (including those in Healthcare and the Care and Separation Unit) to be guided and encouraged effectively into daily and appropriate purposeful activity (work or learning), on a planned pathway to their release and resettlement? (paragraphs 5.16, 5.21 and 5.31-5.35, pages 8, 9 and 11)
- 4.9 What steps are being taken, in consultation with the relevant commissioners of the services concerned, to improve the delivery of (i) healthcare and (ii) education, learning and skills within the prison? (paragraphs 5.12, 5.18, 5.19 and 5.24, pages 7, 8 and 9)
- 4.10 Can the Board be confident that the quality of responses to prisoner complaints, and subsequent follow-up where appropriate, will in future reliably be prompt, legible, comprehensible and effective? (paragraph 6.4, page 16)

Section 5

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 This is the first report submitted by the Independent Monitoring Board for HMP Thameside. It covers the 15 months from 27 March 2012 (when the prison opened) to 30 June 2013. The prison has developed rapidly and no aspect of its work has stood still. Our report gives the Board's evaluation of the quality of the prison in June 2013. It does not tell the story of the year.
- 5.2 Nevertheless, there are elements of historical context to bear in mind.
- 5.2.1 When Serco planned the prison, the population was expected to be adult, mostly prisoners on remand (75%). Things have evolved since March 2012. Only about 50% of prisoners are on remand (the figure on 28 June 2013 was 45%) and 15-20% are young offenders (aged 18-21). Plans have had to be modified quickly, some radically.
- 5.2.2 The vision of HMP Thameside's Director has always been for 'a productive and decent regime' and 'constructive relationships with prisoners, their families and all other Criminal Justice agencies'. His strategy has been to innovate when appropriate, not simply to replicate what is done elsewhere.
- 5.2.3 Staff have been on a steep learning curve. So has the Board.
- 5.2.4 In January 2013, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons inspected the prison. The report (dated May 2013) gives a snapshot of the prison as inspectors saw it in January. The picture has been rapidly overtaken by events and the Band 1 (overall performance is 'of serious concern') awarded on the Prison Rating System for 2012/13 is a travesty.
- 5.3 HMP Thameside is operated by a public limited company (plc), under contract to the Ministry of Justice. Some who work in the public sector and other organisations concerned with criminal justice believe that private sector involvement of this sort is wrong. This is a legitimate point of view, but it is not honest to cite incomplete evidence to justify inaccurate criticisms or to create circumstances that make successful operation of the prison more difficult. Such things have happened during the period covered by this report and the people who ultimately suffer the consequences are the prisoners themselves.
- 5.4 Thameside IMB has sought to be independent of *all* external interests and to focus without fear or favour on our statutory responsibilities. This report makes clear that there are certainly areas where HMP Thameside needs to improve. But a *balanced* evaluation is required and this is what we have done our best to provide. The publication date is over three months after the end of the reporting period, and the prison has developed further in many ways during this period.
- 5.5 The Board has been under-strength throughout the reporting period. We have applied our effort in what we have judged to be the priority areas. We have been assisted by the co-operative attitude of the Director and all his senior colleagues. My personal thanks go to them, and to all members of the Board (including our Clerk), whose hard work and good humour have never wavered.

Geoffrey Penzer

IMB Chair, HMP Thameside

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

- 5.6 The ethos of HMP Thameside, actively driven by the Director and his senior colleagues, is to be non-discriminatory and inclusive. Where staff fall short of this standard, as was the case on a few occasions during the reporting year, they are dealt with quickly and decisively.
- 5.7 The population of the prison is diverse in many dimensions – age, ethnicity, education, nationality, religious belief, etc. A large amount of data is collected and analysed to spot trends and identify circumstances where there might be discrimination. This work is done systematically and covers the behaviour of officers as well as prisoners. When differences between groups fall outside expected statistical fluctuation, they are investigated objectively and honestly. They are not covered up. However, attributing causes to observed trends often requires guesswork. For instance, it is simply not known why self-harmers are disproportionately white.
- 5.8 The prison does not hold vulnerable prisoners in a separate residential unit. Risk assessments are used appropriately and most such prisoners are integrated sensitively and successfully. Prisoner location is actively managed to ensure that individuals who display mutual antagonism (eg because they belong to rival gangs) are held apart in different wings.
- 5.9 The prison has worked hard to develop its relationship and collaboration with the UKBA and (since March 2013) its successor division within the Home Office. About 25 per cent of the foreign national prisoners in HMP Thameside have served their sentences and are being held, often for several months, awaiting deportation or some other resolution (under IS91, authority to detain indefinitely issued by the Home Office). The underlying complexities and difficulties of this situation are not under the control of the prison.
- 5.10 Ministers and Home Office officials are well aware of the IS91 issues and want to resolve them. Nevertheless, for the individuals concerned continuing to hold them in a prison is unfair and scarcely humane. Manifestly, effective preparations have not been made for their release from prison. This is a national embarrassment, the more so given that sentence completion dates are known well in advance and there ought to be abundant time to make suitable and better plans.
- 5.11 Building systems within the prison that support all different groups effectively is work in progress. The population ranges from young gang members to elderly retired men, from those with poor command of English to those who are illiterate although English is their first and only language. There are still acknowledged weaknesses in developing good regimes for all prisoners but there is no complacency. Important developments are in train, such as the provision of translation into a range of languages to assist foreign nationals.

EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

- 5.12 The prison's Director does not control the contract for the education, learning and skills provision in HMP Thameside. When the prison opened in March 2012, NOMS had already decided that a new contractor (A4E) would take over from the initial supplier of learning and skills (Kensington and Chelsea College)

after about six months. Understandably, this created planning blight and the provision drifted in a way that it was difficult for prison managers to influence. When Ofsted inspected as part of the HMIP inspection of the prison in January 2013, it found the leadership and management of learning and skills to be inadequate. There have been improvements since then and there are pockets of dynamism but, overall, there is still a way to go.

- 5.13 The prison's library is part of the education centre but it is operated by Serco not A4E. It took the better part of a year for it to get off the ground but, following determined effort by the staff concerned, by June 2013 it was beginning to provide a range of worthwhile services to prisoners. Further development is required but the Board sees grounds for optimism that the library will increase and improve its provision and the activities offered. It needs to do so.
- 5.14 Prisoners attend an education induction session soon after their arrival in the prison. During this session their levels of English and mathematics are assessed and they are given information about the learning and skills programmes that are available. It is easy for prisoners to apply to enrol for their chosen courses, using the in-cell computer facility. Both distance learning and in-cell learning are offered, as well as class-based courses.
- 5.15 During June 2013, about 200 prisoner education sessions per day were booked, with an attendance rate of about 85%. There will always be a significant proportion of 'no shows' for a range of reasons (such as going to court, transfer to another prison, sickness etc) and the 15% figure is unlikely to be easily reduced much in a prison with the daily levels of movement in and out that are experienced at HMP Thameside.
- 5.16 The Board's major concern about education, learning and skills at the prison is its relevance to the needs of individuals. This arises from two causes. First, the range of programmes on offer, and which the prison is capable of offering, is restricted and not adequate for a significant proportion of the convicted prisoners now being held. Second, the ways that prisoners are guided and encouraged to gain new knowledge and skills relevant to their futures outside prison are insufficiently pro-active or based on assessment of individual needs.
- 5.17 HMP Thameside has well-equipped classroom space (in the education centre and within the residence block) but no proper training workshops. This imposes serious limits on what can be offered, particularly in the context of enhancing the practical skills that may be useful to prisoners on their release. When the prison is extended, as planned, the problem should be substantially reduced but, for the next two years, it will persist as a severe handicap.
- 5.18 The issue of assessing learning needs and tailoring what is offered is a challenge to the prison as a whole, not just A4E, because it starts with the need for individual prisoners to be motivated to learn. Custody staff (especially those on the wings), case managers (from Catch 22) and staff providing career information and advice (Prospects), who all engage with individual prisoners, have important roles to play, and the necessary communication and collaboration between them is not sufficiently reliable. This point is replicated in the Board's report on purposeful activity (see paragraph 5.34 below).

HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL HEALTH

- 5.19 Nowhere has the need for the prison to develop and change rapidly since it opened in March 2012 been more apparent than in healthcare. There have been some complicating factors. The original provider (Harmoni4Health) was taken over by Care UK early in 2013. It is responsible for healthcare in the cluster of three adjacent prisons (HMP Belmarsh, HMP/YOI Isis and HMP Thameside) creating opportunities for economies of scale as well as conflicting priorities. The prison's Director does not control the healthcare service, which is not included within Serco's contract, introducing an extra complicating layer of consultation and negotiation into its management within the prison.
- 5.20 In the early days, prisoners raised many concerns about prompt and reliable dispensing of medication. Finding the best way to manage this has proved challenging. The Heads of Residence and Healthcare have worked closely to resolve problems and have made significant changes with further developments, such as deployment of pharmacy technicians on wings to administer medications, in the pipeline. An In-Possession policy is in place, with risk assessments performed and reviewed at regular intervals, appropriate to the prisoner and the medication. One of the fruits of all the effort is that the volume of healthcare-related concerns reported to the IMB reduced considerably by June 2013.
- 5.21 Staffing Healthcare has been difficult throughout the year, during much of which there has been considerable use of agency nurses and locum GPs. However, through proactive recruitment strategies all nurse vacancies have, at the time of reporting, been filled. A lead GP is now in post. Efforts are being made to recruit permanent part-time GPs to work across the cluster and two should start in September 2013. Ten trained and qualified mental health nurses work with in-patients and four in the In-Reach service on the wings. Their work is supported by a visiting psychiatrist from South London and Maudsley on five days a week. An occupational therapist provides small group work on two mornings a week for mentally ill in-patients and an art teacher runs an occasional 'open' class. However, in general only limited activity is offered to prisoners whilst in Healthcare.
- 5.22 Primary healthcare screening of all prisoners takes place on their arrival in the prison, in Reception. The physical layout does not allow these interviews to be confidential and there are plans to relocate them to the first night centre, where this will be rectified.
- 5.23 Prisoners can request out-patient appointments with healthcare staff (including a dentist) using the in-cell computer facility, and bookings are generally made promptly. Waiting lists are not unreasonably long. Three clinics for prisoners with long-term conditions (diabetes, epilepsy and asthma) are held weekly and there is a sexual health clinic (recently re-branded with the involvement of the prisoner forum, PIAC, as a Well-Man clinic). Support for overcoming addiction to tobacco has not been offered but is planned. There are two nurses who specialise in the care of prisoners with learning disabilities, when needed.
- 5.24 The in-patient facility (18 beds) is normally occupied close to its capacity, predominantly by prisoners whose mental health problems make it difficult for them to cope on normal location. It is often a challenging environment for healthcare and custody staff alike, with a number of patients on ACCTs needing

to be monitored frequently. Some require three officers to manage their behaviour. There have been tensions between mental health staff and discipline staff sometimes when their roles have been unclear. However, the prison and healthcare management are addressing this issue and key changes to the regime structure are being implemented.

- 5.25 The average waiting time for transfer of mentally-ill patients to a medium or high secure hospital is three weeks. The shortest time has been two weeks and the longest twelve. Such delays may seem reasonable in all the circumstances but they are not. Even though staff are caring, a prison's healthcare facility is not a suitable or humane location for someone who is truly and seriously mentally ill, even for a day. Furthermore, the presence of seriously disturbed patients within Healthcare has a deleterious impact on the care of other less sick patients through disruption and antisocial behaviour. This is unfair on them.
- 5.26 Between July 2012 and June 2013, 36 prisoners were transferred to a psychiatric intensive care unit and two to a high secure hospital.
- 5.27 Part of one wing is residence for prisoners on the Integrated Drug Treatment Strategy (IDTS). They collect their methadone or subutex from a dedicated hatch, located separately from other medication collection points. A clinical lead nurse for IDTS across the cluster is in post and a compact for prisoners serving over six months to follow a detox programme, in accordance with new government requirements, is due to be introduced.
- 5.28 Complementing the work of Healthcare, one of Serco's partners, Turning Point, provides psycho-social interventions for prisoners with alcohol and drug misuse problems. Its manager has devised bespoke programmes appropriate for his Thameside client group. They are well attended and receive good feedback. Hard-hitting in its approach, Turning Point provides the framework in which prisoners talk about their drug use; it aims to teach skills to cope with issues without resort to drugs and alcohol; to bring about an understanding of the human cost; and to address reducing reoffending.
- 5.29 Turning Point carries a caseload of about a third of the prison population and uses, alongside its team of experienced workers, a small number of trained and accredited peer mentors. It has piloted use of a 'through the gate' worker, appointed in April 2013 and funded by London Borough of Newham, who links up with prisoners from the Borough at an early stage and works with them in prison and after release into the community. In the first three months this scheme was so successful in facilitating the engagement of offenders post-release that the Borough changed the pilot into a fully funded post for three years.
- 5.30 Basic healthcare facilities are good and there is a genuine will in the prison to deliver a modern and effective healthcare service. Much has been achieved and much still needs to be developed. For instance, the information about healthcare given to prisoners on arrival and its provision in different languages is not yet good enough. Healthcare provision focused on the needs of elderly prisoners is rudimentary. The promised smoking cessation programme is badly needed. Dispensing medication with 100 per cent reliability and timeliness needs to become firmly embedded.

PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY

- 5.31 Organising appropriate purposeful activity for the rapidly turning-over population of prisoners in HMP Thameside is a challenge. On the basis of a 5% random sample of prisoners, at the end of the Board's reporting year, roughly 45% participated in seven or more activity sessions a week, 30% in three to six sessions, 15% in one or two and 10% in none. There are three main components – employment, education or training, and other directed activity (such as gym, library).
- 5.32 Most employment opportunities are 'domestic' – cleaning, kitchens, laundry – or helping to ensure the smooth running of the prison in some other way (for example, working in the first night centre or as a Listener, a foreign nationals rep, a violence reduction rep). These are worthwhile, indeed necessary, tasks although many are not of direct relevance to obtaining employment on release.
- 5.33 Suitable procedures for allocating work and keeping records have been instituted. There are no training workshops on site so prisoners may need to acquire new skills on the job. Rates of pay are fair. At the end of June 2013, about 300 'jobs' – work occupying seven half-day sessions per week – were filled. A number of prisoners held more than one post, so significantly fewer than 300 men were in work. Although remand prisoners are not obliged to work, the proportions of remand and convicted prisoners employed were similar.
- 5.34 When allowance is made for those not available for employment (for health, suitability or disciplinary reasons, or because they were recent arrivals), in June 2013 there were about 100 convicted prisoners who had chosen not to apply for work or to attend education. The prison is starting to target this group to encourage purposeful activity and apply sanctions to those who refuse to engage. This is timely. The prison is not yet sufficiently pro-active in directing prisoners towards the activities (employment or education) that will be of the greatest benefit in reducing the risk of their reoffending on release.
- 5.35 Levels of supervision and management of prisoners whilst they are working are variable. Care is taken to maintain security, but the quantity and quality of the work itself is not reliably monitored. For example, some cleaners take a pride in what they do but others appear to work to lower standards. Quite apart from the issue of their not providing value to the prison for the wages paid, poor working is not good preparation for release.

RESETTLEMENT

- 5.36 A major benefit of the ready access to telephones, 24/7, for prisoners at HMP Thameside is that they are able to maintain good contact with their families. Family-friendly visiting facilities are another strength. Prisoners who wish to maintain strong links with their families and friends are in a position to do so.
- 5.37 Serco's partner organisation, Catch 22, allocates a named case manager to every prisoner and one-to-one consultation surgeries are now offered daily on the wings. The changed make-up of the prisoner population compared to what was anticipated when services were planned (doubling the number of convicted prisoners) has had a significant impact on the Catch 22 workload. Practices

and procedures took a time to be refined and settle down but by June 2013 they were working properly.

- 5.38 A number of courses are offered by the education provider (A4E) that are relevant to preparing prisoners for release and resettlement (money management, preparation for work, career planning) and case managers themselves support some prisoners one-to-one to address their offending behaviours. The development of group-work sessions is planned for the coming year.
- 5.39 Links with external service providers (police, probation, local authorities) have developed over the year, and Catch 22 itself works 'through the gate' as well as within the prison. This is a complex area of work, especially where several agencies need to provide input before a decision (such as whether to allow early release with home detention curfew) can be made, and delays which disadvantage an individual prisoner have sometimes occurred.
- 5.40 The target of ensuring that over 80% of convicted prisoners have accommodation arranged for them on release has been met. The target that over 26% have employment organised on release has not always been met – partly because there are particular times of year (such as holiday periods) when making the necessary contacts and arrangements is especially difficult.

SAFER CUSTODY

- 5.41 According to the survey of prisoner views conducted by HMIP during its inspection in January 2013, prisoners feel considerably safer in HMP Thameside than in most other local prisons. This, despite a significant level of gang related violence between (mainly) young offenders, is testament to the prison's commitment to providing safe custody. From the beginning, every effort has been made to ensure the safety of prisoners (including when under escort outside the prison), staff and the prison buildings.
- 5.42 A characteristic feature of HMP Thameside is the speed and determination with which it identifies, acknowledges and responds to challenges as they arise. As a new prison, there have been many of them. For example, the arrival of young offenders, with their attitudes of defiance, fearlessness and gang membership, caused considerable disruption. To maintain the safety of prisoners and staff, changes to the regime and new procedures were designed and implemented quickly. Three experienced gang specialists were employed to work with Safer Custody and Security staff to keep the different gang members apart especially in Visits and the gym. The steps taken were effective in providing a safer environment, reducing bullying and violence.
- 5.43 Care is taken to identify prisoners at risk of self harm. ACCT procedures are conscientiously implemented, with appropriate periodic refresher training for staff. Record keeping has sometimes been haphazard and some case reviews have been delayed, but there were improvements towards the end of the reporting year. The provision of telephones in all cells enhances safe custody through giving prisoners access to their families and friends, and also to services such as the Samaritans, at all times.

- 5.44 Reception throughput is high, with around 40 prisoners leaving each morning and a similar number arriving or returning each evening. Staff work well as a team, providing quick, dignified and respectful searching of prisoners when they arrive. Risk assessments are made promptly. There are good arrangements for prisoners for their first night, with a group of trained Listeners and other knowledgeable prisoners on hand to help newcomers and deal with their questions.
- 5.45 Few allegations of prisoner/prisoner bullying have been brought to the Board's attention. There is zero tolerance of any bullying or intimidation of prisoners by staff. Cell searches are part of the Security Department's remit and, although prisoners do not like them, there have not been significant complaints about the way they are carried out. Tool and equipment searches are also undertaken regularly.
- 5.46 Planned and unplanned incidents where there has been use of force are analysed systematically to check that they have been properly handled and to learn any lessons (see paragraph 5.7 above). When IMB members have observed planned interventions, they have seen staff making every effort to control and keep to a minimum the use of force.
- 5.47 The effective use of incentives and earned privileges (IEPs) has improved during the reporting period, and the prison appears to be prepared for the new IEP regime promulgated by the Secretary of State and planned for implementation in autumn 2013. Decisions about IEP level are made fairly but the system is not yet being used consistently or optimally to promote positive attitudes and behaviour.
- 5.48 There was one death in custody during the reporting period. Whilst there are lessons to be learned from the way it was handled by some of the staff concerned, the Board has no major concerns about the circumstances or the prison's response. The inquest and its findings are still awaited.

SEGREGATION, CARE AND SEPARATION

- 5.49 The Care and Separation Unit (CSU) occupies its own building. It contains 20 cells, most of which have been occupied most of the time since the prison reached its capacity towards the end of 2012. It is a compact and suitably fitted-out facility, and it is kept clean and tidy. Staff work together well as a team and have rapidly acquired the confidence and competence to manage the sometimes volatile prisoners that the unit houses. Force is used sparingly, correctly and as a last resort. However, the number of staff receiving injuries is a concern.
- 5.50 There is a good understanding of the role of the Board and staff are invariably co-operative and informative when questioned. Despite frequent reminders, a reliable system for keeping the Board informed about the occupancy of the CSU has not been established.
- 5.51 Prisoners are moved to the CSU for appropriate reasons. Decisions made at adjudications and reviews are fair, and care is generally taken to ensure that the prisoner understands the rules and the rationale for the process. Officers involved in the incident that is the subject of the adjudication do not always

attend to give evidence in person because (eg) their shift pattern prevents it. The correct procedures when this occurs have not always been explained well to the prisoner concerned, which is unfair.

- 5.52 Whilst in the CSU, prisoners are monitored and managed correctly. Those with open ACCT documents are checked with the required frequency. Nurses visit routinely with medication and a doctor visits when necessary. Many of the prisoners have mental health issues, and there have been instances when it was debatable whether the individual should have been held in the CSU or moved to Healthcare. When there have been dirty protests, or instances of food refusal, they have been carefully managed.
- 5.53 In most cases the duration of a prisoner's stay in CSU is appropriately short but there were a small number of cases during the reporting year when the length of stay exceeded one month. In each instance there were specific circumstances that made relocation back to the main residence area inappropriate at the time and, in each such case, the prison worked actively and ultimately successfully to overcome the difficulties or to arrange a move of the prisoner to an establishment that was better equipped to handle his needs.

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

- 5.54 The cells in HMP Thameside are of good, appropriate quality. They are well equipped. Technology is used to enhance operational efficiency, prisoner safety and preparation for release. Prisoners pay for the services they use and the surpluses generated once the full costs of provision have been covered are available to purchase items to benefit the prisoner population as a whole, such as additional equipment for the gym, as proposed by prisoner representatives and agreed by the prison.
- 5.55 The day-to-day running of the landings in the prison's ten separate wings has been an area where the lack of experience of many new staff and the need for them to gain skills and confidence very quickly have been particularly significant. This initially led to work being done at a higher level than intended. Supervisors did tasks that should have been undertaken by custody officers; managers did supervisors' work. At all levels, the time available to perform the proper duties of the posts got squeezed.
- 5.56 During the reporting year there have been times when the Board has observed almost continuous organisational fire-fighting. Some of the 'fires' could and probably should have been avoided in the first place. However, the prison's characteristic response to problems has been to analyse their cause, and then take quick and decisive steps to address them. For instance, by the end of the reporting year stronger staff structures and more robust systems had been established that ensure that prisoners are reliably unlocked when necessary to receive their medication or to move to their planned activities.
- 5.57 When HMIP reported following its visit to the prison in January 2013, it was particularly critical of the small amount of time some prisoners spend out of their cells. This is less a 'welfare' issue than it may be in some other establishments because of the high standard of the cells themselves at HMP Thameside and the quality of the facilities within them. In the Board's judgement, the significant issue is not the amount of time prisoners have for 'association' (in essence,

recreation) but the availability and direction of genuine ‘purposeful activity’ (which in some instances, such as distance learning, might be undertaken within a cell). The prison has not yet got fully to grips with this issue but recognises the problem and is committed to improving its performance (see paragraph 5.34 above).

- 5.58 Food is generally good and there have been very few complaints about it. Care is taken to ensure that the menus offered provide for a balanced and adequate diet. There is a good range of choices from which prisoners can order using their in-cell computer. Particular dietary needs are catered for properly and the practical arrangements for those fasting during Ramadan operate well. Servery operations have developed to be generally satisfactory, although at times during the reporting year there was a failure to ensure fair portion control. Staff and prisoners work together well in the kitchen itself.
- 5.59 The gym is an excellent facility, much valued by the many prisoners who use it. The target is to provide 400 prisoner-places per day. This total includes 20 prisoners per session playing football on the outside pitch. In reality the average is less than 400 due to non-attendance for similar reasons to those that affect education (see paragraph 5.15 above). Staff and prisoners alike have told the IMB that there is a good relaxed atmosphere; one prisoner said, when asked about the staff, that they were ‘great officers – nice people’.
- 5.60 The Visitor Centre (where visitors check in prior to entry to the prison) and the Visits Hall itself are good facilities. Both are as child friendly as possible, given their location in a prison. There were some teething difficulties initially (including visitors found attempting to pass drugs and other contraband to prisoners) but systems and staffing have been improved and visitor sessions generally run smoothly and in a good atmosphere.
- 5.61 The chaplaincy is a close knit unit that provides good support to prisoners and prison staff. Three Christian chaplains (Church of England, Catholic and Non-conformist) and an Imam are employed by the prison. Chaplains for other denominations, faiths and beliefs (for instance, Sikh, Pagan) visit the prison from time to time, depending on need.

Section 6

THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

- 6.1 The correct complement for the HMP Thameside IMB has never been formally established but, for a prison with 900 prisoners, it is at least 15. In March 2012, when the prison took its first prisoners, the Board had five members, including the chair and vice-chair (who doubled as Board Development Officer); three of the five were dual-boarders. At the end of June 2013, the membership was eight, six of whom were fully trained (including three dual-boarders) and two of whom were in their first year and still being trained.
- 6.2 A Board member has visited the prison on two or three occasions every week since March 2012, including a small number of week-end, night-time and evening visits. As well as visiting all areas of the prison, members have attended a selection of the prison's own working meetings and training sessions most months, and a sample of adjudications and reviews.
- 6.3 The Board has set its monitoring agenda based on an evaluation of the areas where this has been most needed, rather than on 'following the Applications' (though it has done this to an extent as the table below illustrates) or simply doing what seems to have become conventional in IMBs nationally.
- 6.4 The Board has resisted the pressures to operate a shadow complaints system or a lost property service. These pressures, which are commonly experienced by IMBs, have been made worse because the prison's own handling of prisoner complaints is not yet reliably good. Central administration of the process is competent, but some of the individual members of staff who need to provide answers fail to do so in a timely way and sometimes the responses themselves are unclear or are not followed up by the actions they require.
- 6.5 The Board has tried to make good use of the abundant statistical and management information that the prison has made freely available to it, though we have not even scratched the surface of the monitoring possibilities of the evidence recorded by the prison's many cameras.
- 6.6 There are two practical issues that have affected the efficiency with which Board members have been able to perform their monitoring work.
- 6.7 All trained members are able to draw keys but only two sets are available. This has not often been a problem during the reporting year because there have not been many occasions when three or more members were in the prison together wishing to visit different areas. But the frequency when this occurs will increase as the Board expands and additional sets of keys need to be made available.
- 6.8 The second issue has been access to IT systems. There has been no direct access to PNOMIS. Serco's training requirements before passwords can be issued to enable use of the prison's Custody Management System are properly stringent but the timing and infrequency of training sessions have caused lengthy delays for some members.
- 6.9 The Director has always been available to take our queries and comments, and has met with us formally each month to answer questions and share his perspective on the way things have gone and are developing, in a frank and

illuminating way. When we have raised issues with him he has given us answers. The Ministry of Justice Controller and his Deputy, too, have always been open and supportive of the Board.

- 6.10 The Board raised one issue, formally, with the Minister (in late summer 2012) when delays in the installation of access to the Police National Computer were in danger of putting prisoners at risk by making performance of proper risk assessments slow and difficult.

Applications to the IMB – 27 March 2012 to 30 June 2013

Code	Subject	Number
A	Accommodation	4
B	Adjudications	7
C	Equality & Diversity (inc religion)	6
D	Education/employment/training inc IEP	13
E 1	Family/visits inc mail & phone	60
E 2	Finance/pay	31
F	Food/kitchen related	5
G	Health related	109
H 1	Property (within current establishment)	43
H 2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	38
H 3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	33
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	33
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc bullying	68
K	Transfers	15
L	Miscellaneous	13
	Total number of IMB applications	478
	Of total: number of IMB Confidential Access was:	5