



# Annual Report HMP Thameside

1 July 2013 – 30 June 2014

**Section 1**

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**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 (IMB) 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

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### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

- 3.1 HMP Thameside is a category B (Cat 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 operated at close to its Op Cap throughout the reporting year, and on 30 June 2014 it held 900 prisoners (about 12% of whom were young offenders and about 8% over 50s). Of the total, about 20% 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 choose 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 for 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 visitor centre and a large hall for visits with good facilities for visiting children.
- 3.4 Accommodation for administration is generally appropriate but for some functions (e.g. IT) it is too cramped and there is a shortage of well-located cellular office space for some managers who need it.
- 3.5 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 The IMB's monitoring has found that HMP Thameside has taken many strides forward during the reporting year. Although progress has not been equally good on all fronts, overall it has been impressive. Whereas in its first year the prison focused on establishing all the systems it needed, in its second it has successfully refined these systems and improved their quality. On retiring in March 2014, the first Director, Guy Baulf, told staff he believed that they had created a five-year-old prison in just two years. The IMB agrees that great progress has been made.
- 4.2 The current Director, John Biggin, has told the IMB that his top priority is to build up staff skills yet further, administrative skills, custody skills and management skills. The IMB fully agrees with this approach because almost all the areas where the Board has concerns, as detailed in the body of this report, can be resolved when staff have enhanced their knowledge, skills and confidence.
- 4.3 There are two particular areas of the prison's work with prisoners that have been especially impressive during 2013/14.
- The library is a hive of activity from which many prisoners gain a great deal. It successfully combines being responsive to prisoner interests and requests with the promotion of activities that the prison wants prisoners to undertake. It has been active and successful in attracting funding and other support from a range of sources.
  - The prison enables any prisoner that wants to do so to maintain good contact with their family. The availability of telephones, 24/7, is much appreciated by many prisoners. Family-friendly visiting facilities and support staff have a powerfully positive impact, and special family visiting days have gained in popularity and take-up throughout the year.
- 4.4 The IMB has a range of concerns about the way the prison operates at present that are listed below in Section 5 of this report. All are significant and need to be addressed, but none is of burning and immediate importance. None will be any surprise to the Minister, the Chief Executive of NOMS or the Director of the prison.

## Section 5

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### 5.1 CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

#### Headlines

- HMP Thameside has made good progress during 2013/14 in consolidating and improving the quality of the systems and practices it established during its first year: it has come a very long way.
- The prison has always been occupied at close to its Op Cat (900) though the makeup has fluctuated from about 40% remand at the start of the period to 60% in June 2014, from over 20% young offenders to about 10%.
- Staffing has stabilised and levels of experience and skill have demonstrably improved during the year. Staff-prisoner relationships are generally positive. Sickness absence is very low.
- There is an enthusiasm for improvement and the Director has highlighted the continuing need for staff training, including management training at several levels, in order to achieve and reinforce a consistently high standard of programme delivery.
- The Monitoring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) survey (late 2013) reported that prisoners view HMP Thameside significantly more positively than most other Cat B Local prisons. The IMB, too, judges that the prison can tell a story of evolving success.

#### Concern

- The regime of a Cat B Local prison is not designed for over a quarter of the men typically held at HMP Thameside: many are Cat C or Cat D prisoners, some are lifers or held under IS91, and some have mental illnesses or conditions that the prison's healthcare is not equipped or intended to treat. None of this is fair.

Geoffrey Penzer  
IMB Chair, HMP Thameside  
August 2014

## **5.2 EQUALITY AND INCLUSION**

### **Headlines**

- Consistently led by the prison's Directors, HMP Thameside is actively committed to equality, inclusivity and being non-discriminatory: there is a zero tolerance approach for anything less than good practice.
- Zero tolerance is easier to apply to staff, who can face summary dismissal, than to prisoners.
- Staff often face abusive behaviour by prisoners that offends one or more of the nine protected characteristics: more officers are now gaining the confidence to challenge it as they should.
- The prison has good systems for monitoring its own performance, such as monthly checks that use of force does not target particular groups, or is being used disproportionately by officers from a particular background.
- There are effective arrangements to ensure that prisoners of any religion or belief receive appropriate support, that all prisoners have equal access to the prison's facilities, and that the IEP regime and allocation of work are administered fairly.
- Vulnerable prisoners are successfully and safely accommodated on normal location within Residence: there is no VP Wing.
- The prison's Diversity Department works well with other units (such as the chaplains, the foreign nationals department) and arranged several valuable events during the year (such as Black History month).
- Prisoner Diversity Reps and Foreign Nationals Reps make strong contributions.

### **Concerns**

- Whilst the physical facilities are appropriate for older men, the prison has not yet developed a broad range of purposeful activities for this group (about 8% of the population in June 2014, including those who have retired). This is not fair.
- A disproportionate number of prisoners who spend time in the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) come from a BME heritage: the IMB is confident that they are judged fairly at adjudications but it remains possible that there is unintended bias in the prison's regimes and practices that increases the likelihood that they may misbehave.
- Although arrangements to provide information to prisoners who do not speak or read English have improved, they are still relatively weak: this is particularly significant for induction of new prisoners and informing them about healthcare.
- The prison employs staff from many backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the local community, but senior managers and directors are mainly white.

## **5.3 EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS**

### **Headlines**

- The prison recognises that learning is central to rehabilitation and that formal education courses provide an important component of the learning opportunities the prison needs to offer, but not the only one: all interactions between prison staff and prisoners have the potential to promote learning.
- The providers of courses or programmes (A4E for the formal 'education' courses and also Catch 22 for preparing for release, Turning Point for overcoming and resisting substance misuse, Prospects for career advice and guidance) all offer opportunities to prisoners that are appropriate in their intent. However, the IMB is not competent to evaluate their quality.
- During 2013/14, the prison's library has been transformed from a dysfunctional embarrassment to a vibrant and effective facility, heavily used by prisoners, that offers many opportunities for learning from improving basic literacy to writing book reviews: it is one of the year's most high profile success stories.

### **Concerns**

- Although there are opportunities in a small number of areas to study for a vocational qualification, such as the kitchen and the gym, general provision for vocational courses is weak, and opportunities for prisoners to get credit for some of the work-related training they undertake (for instance as listeners or peer mentors) are missed.
- Virtual Campus provision, which had been planned and was 'ready to roll' by Spring 2014, was and is held up because MoJ has not authorised the prison to activate it.
- Personal officers and other Wing staff are not yet generally proactive in encouraging prisoners to think about the learning that will be most use to them when they eventually leave prison.

## **5.4 HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL HEALTH**

### **Headlines**

- Provision of healthcare at HMP Thameside has improved during 2013/14 and effective collaboration between healthcare and prison custody staff is now much better.
- Care UK's staffing is more stable than a year ago and the number of prisoner Applications to the IMB expressing concerns about healthcare has fallen substantially over the year.
- Turning Point engages well with many of the men who have substance misuse issues.
- The appointments booking system (using the in-cell computer facility) works well and waiting times for outpatient appointments to see a GP or a dentist are not too long.
- There are regular clinics for long-term conditions like diabetes and there is a Well Man (sexual health) clinic.

### **Concerns**

- Health promotion initiatives are still underdeveloped.
- There is no proper programme to help prisoners reduce their tobacco addictions.
- Opportunities to publicise healthy living messages are missed: for example in the outpatients waiting area, where staff at the reception desk too often fail to engage constructively with prisoners.
- A majority of Healthcare in-patients at any time have mental health problems, which are often untreatable in the prison: they absorb disproportionate amounts of staff time and have a negative impact on the environment in which the other patients live. Holding such individuals untreated in a prison is not humane.

## **5.5 PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY**

### **Headlines**

- Purposeful activity at HMP Thameside needs to be organised in the contexts of high prisoner turnover and the considerable proportion of remand prisoners, who do not have the same obligation to work as convicted men.
- A much slicker system of work allocation has been developed during 2013/14 and the number of individuals who work for at least seven sessions a week has increased.
- The tighter Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) regime introduced by the MoJ late in 2013 has been effective in increasing the incentive for convicted prisoners to work and to attend education courses.
- There are other sorts of purposeful activity available – through the gym, in education, the library, the faith centre: any prisoner who chooses to do so can organise at least another five activity sessions in these areas, so long as his behaviour and record do not place restrictions on what he is permitted.

### **Concerns**

- The range of work opportunities is limited and many do not have direct relevance to gaining or improving skills that are valued in the workplace outside prison: this situation should be rectified when the workshops currently under construction are opened in 2015.
- The quality of work supervision by staff is variable and the ways prisoners perform is sometimes too perfunctory: accepting low work standards is not good preparation for release.
- If a remand prisoner chooses not to engage in any activity, a consequence is that he spends much of the day in his cell, being unlocked only for exercise, association and to collect his meals and any medication: this situation is unhealthy and staff are not always proactive in encouraging a better attitude.

## **5.6 RESETTLEMENT**

### **Headlines**

- HMP Thameside has excellent facilities for enabling prisoners to maintain good contacts with their families – in particular, ready access to telephones 24/7: other opportunities such as ‘story-book dads’ are available for those who want to use them.
- Family-friendly visiting facilities are a great strength and the prison organises excellent ‘Dad’s days’ and ‘Family days’ when prisoners and their wives, partners, children and grandchildren can enjoy time together in a relaxed atmosphere: the high value of these sessions in maintaining and strengthening family ties is convincingly self-evident to anyone who monitors them.
- Catch 22, which is responsible for case management and identifying what prisoners need in order to prepare for resettlement, was overwhelmed by the volume of work during the first part of the year but had made improvements by June 2014, with the backlog of OASys assessments much reduced.
- For many prisoners resettlement requires rehabilitation, and rehabilitation requires the development of confidence in the fairness of the ‘systems’ they encounter, something which their experience to date makes them doubt.

### **Concerns**

- The prison does not yet do enough to foster such confidence by ensuring that its treatment of prisoners is not only fair (which the IMB finds it generally is), but is seen and believed by prisoners to be fair (which the IMB finds it too often is not) – see 5.8 and 5.9.

## 5.7 SAFER CUSTODY

### Headlines

- The prison's procedures for ensuring that prisoners are safe are implemented conscientiously and effectively: the MQPL survey in 2013 indicated that prisoners feel safer in HMP Thameside than in most comparable Cat B Local prisons.
- The prison's security and violence reduction sections, working with Catch 22, have a particularly effective system for identifying gang members and managing gang rivalries so that they do not spill over into violence.
- The level of positives found through mandatory drug testing is less than that set as the maximum 'acceptable' for the prison and the IMB has not found the availability of drugs or their use as currency to be a major safer custody concern, though their presence at any level in the prison is undesirable.
- Three sniffer dogs have been added to the prison staff during 2013/14.
- The prison, with Turning Point, is alert to the new challenges posed by the availability of the growing range of legal highs.
- Staff have improved their skills at handling and defusing any assaults or other outbreaks of violence, and they use force as sparingly as they are able.
- Reception arrangements have become slicker and the frequency with which admitting new arrivals continues into the very late evening has fallen away.
- The first night centre is well run and trained prisoner listeners are available to help newcomers if required.
- The presence of a range of easily identified 'reps' of various kinds (for foreign nationals, violence reduction, diversity) adds to the feeling and the reality of safety on the Wings.
- ACCT procedures are well understood by staff and the IMB's monitoring finds that they are implemented conscientiously.

### Concerns

- There is a fairly low but undesirable level of assaults (on other prisoners and on staff) and fights, often involving younger men: usually they spring up spontaneously because of some disagreement and are not apparently planned in a calculated way.
- There was one death inside the prison during the reporting year and, subject to an inquest's eventual findings, the IMB knows of no reason to suggest that the prison contributed materially to the circumstances of the death, although there were some lessons which have been incorporated into improved practices.
- The persistent and long delays in completing inquests on prisoners who have died in custody are unfair on the man's family and friends, and on any prison staff who have been directly involved.

## **5.8 SEGREGATION, CARE AND SEPARATION**

### **Headlines**

- The management of the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) has been improved since the IMB reported last year and the atmosphere is generally calmer and quieter than it used to be: nurses visit routinely with medication and a doctor visits when necessary, chaplains and a duty manager conduct daily rounds.
- The administration of adjudications has improved and the IMB finds that the outcomes are fair.
- Reviews are normally conducted as required and those that the IMB has monitored have been handled well.
- Staff manage the occasional instances of indiscipline, damage to a cell, dirty protest or food refusal calmly and well, and often succeed in de-escalating the trouble before it gets very far.

### **Concerns**

- Although few men are held in CSU for periods in excess of 4 weeks, there have been several instances during the year when a prisoner has been in the unit for considerably longer than this, with all efforts to return them to normal location proving unsuccessful.
- The administration of adjudications has improved but it is not yet always good. Sometimes it appears sloppy (untidy paperwork, slouching postures): this encourages a similarly lax attitude in prisoners and does nothing to build their confidence in 'the system' more generally.
- The way that some officers give their evidence at adjudications can be abrupt and apparently lacking in objectivity.

## 5.9 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

### Headlines

- HMP Thameside is a new prison and its residential facilities are good: the in-cell computers and telephones are of real benefit to prisoners.
- Wing staff are more experienced and confident than when the IMB last reported and this has had a significant impact on the general atmosphere on the wings, which are now calmer and better organised.
- Almost all the cells are designed to accommodate two prisoners and careful cell-sharing risk assessments are completed before two men are put together.
- There is good communication with prisoners about regime changes and other issues (like the introduction of new IEP arrangements in autumn 2013) which helps to contain and reduce anxiety and uncertainty.
- The gym is an excellent facility which many prisoners use on a regular basis.
- The Visitor Centre and the Visits Hall itself are good facilities, both of which are as child-friendly as is compatible with being part of a prison.
- Food is good.
- The surpluses generated from sales of tobacco and telephone charges are deployed well by prisoners' representatives on items such as additional gym equipment, resources for the library and support for family days, which benefit the prison population as a whole.
- The chaplaincy (an Imam and three Christian chaplains are employed by the prison) is a close knit unit that provides good support to prisoners and prison staff of any faith or none: it was nominated for an internal Serco company award for innovative practice during the reporting year.

### Concerns

- The personal officer system is not yet providing great benefits for prisoners.
- Prisoners' property is kept safely in the prison's well-run property store but there are too many instances when it is mislaid or lost during transfers between prisons, or between prison and court, or within HMP Thameside when a prisoner has an unplanned move (e.g. from a wing to CSU).
- Compliant prisoners get plenty of opportunities to be outside their cells each day but those who choose not to participate in the available activities spend much of their time behind their doors, apart from exercise and association periods, which is neither healthy nor good preparation for release.
- Sometimes wings cannot be cooled to a reasonable living temperature during high summer.
- The handling of prisoner complaints has certainly improved markedly during the reporting year, actively driven by the Directors and their senior colleagues. However, the IMB finds that there can still be delays in answering a complaint, that responses (both oral and written) do not always contain a *persuasive* explanation of the decision, and that some officers regard complaints as an irritant rather than an opportunity to learn something.

## Section 6

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### THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

#### Headlines

- Members of the IMB have visited the prison for monitoring purposes every week during the reporting year despite the Board being significantly under strength
- Only three Board members are fully trained and committed to HMP Thameside's IMB alone. They have been greatly helped by three colleagues who are members of the IMB for HMP Belmarsh and who have doubled their workloads by joining the HMP Thameside Board too. During the year four new members were recruited, who have started their training.
- The prison provides a 50% fte administrator to work as the IMB clerk: during 2013/14, his support to the Board has been unfailing and without him the Board itself may well have failed.
- The IMB has worked with two open and helpful prison Directors during the year – Guy Baulf until he retired at the end of March 2014 and John Biggin, who succeeded him in April.
- Prison staff have always answered our questions and explained their work courteously and, when necessary, with patience. They understand and respect our obligation to be independent.

#### Concerns

- The challenge of recruiting, retaining and training new Board members from diverse backgrounds has not been cracked.
- Some processes and practices promulgated by the National Council for IMBs do not seem appropriate or relevant for a prison such as HMP Thameside in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

## Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Number (%) 27/3/12 to 30/6/13	Number (%) 1/7/13 to 30/6/14
A	Accommodation	4 (1)	9 (2)
B	Adjudications	7 (1)	3 (1)
C	Equality & Diversity (inc religion)	6 (1)	4 (1)
D	Education/employment/training inc IEP	13 (3)	24 (6)
E1	Family/visits inc mail & phone	60 (13)	29 (8)
E2	Finance/pay	31 (6)	13 (3)
F	Food/kitchen related	5 (1)	3 (1)
G	Health related	109 (22)	53 (14)
H1	Property (within current establishment)	43 (9)	60 (16)
H2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	38 (8)	26 (7)
H3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	33 (7)	11 (3)
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	33 (7)	46 (12)
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc. bullying	68 (14)	66 (17)
K	Transfers	15 (3)	12 (3)
L	Miscellaneous	13 (3)	20 (5)
	<b>Total number of IMB applications</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>379</b>
	Of total: number of IMB Confidential Access was:	5	16