



Independent Monitoring Board

HMP &YOI Thorn Cross

**Annual Report
May 2011– April 2012**

Section 1

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

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.

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.**

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

CONTENTS

Section 1	Statutory role of the Independent Monitoring Board	p.2
Section 2	Contents	p.3
Section 3	Description of the prison	p.4
Section 4	Executive Summary	p.5
Section 5	Report on required areas	
	Equality and Inclusion	p.7
	Education, Learning and Skills	p.7
	Healthcare and Mental Health	p.9
	Purposeful Activity	p.9
	Resettlement	p.10
	Safer custody	p.10
	Care and Separation	p.10
	Residential Services	p.11
Section 6	Other areas of the prison regime	p12
Section 7	The work of the Independent Monitoring Board	p.13

Section 3

DESCRIPTION OF PRISON

- 3.1.1 HMP &YOI Thorn Cross is located on the outskirts of Warrington. It was purpose built in 1985 as an open establishment for male juvenile and young offenders and has a capacity for 322 prisoners in 6 units. It was re-rolled in 2008 to become a prison for 18 to 25 year old men. The High Intensity Training (HIT) unit caters for up to 60 prisoners and also has an Independent Living Unit for prisoners working outside. Two 60 bed units cater for 18 to 21 year olds and two units for 21 to 25 year olds. There is a secure closed Care and Separation Unit (CSU) with an additional 10 cells where prisoners can be placed for reasons of care and separation.
- 3.1.2 In January 2011 Thorn Cross was twinned with HMP Risley. For a short period the prisons had the same Governor and several posts were shared between the two sites. However, the twinning was ended in early 2012, with the establishments again becoming separate, though some functions remain shared. A new governor was appointed to Thorn Cross in February 2012.
- 3.1.3 There is a variety of workshops and the education department provides general education, art, computer skills, life skills and a variety of specialised courses. Additional and evening programmes are offered in Thinking Skills, Anger Management, Parenting etc. Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare (CARATS) offer counselling for drug use and there is a comprehensive resettlement programme.
- 3.1.4 The gym and weights room and the playing fields offer a wide variety of sports
- 3.1.5 Training and education is provided by Manchester College. Healthcare is commissioned by Warrington Health Consortium and provided by the Bridgewater Community Health Care Trust. Escorts are provided by GeoAmey.

Section 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.1.1 In February 2012, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons carried out a full announced inspection of Thorn Cross. The inspection found that Thorn Cross is 'one of the better establishments in the prison estate' (Inspection Report on HMP and YOI Thorn Cross, 13-17 February 2012, p.5) and in the Healthy Prisons tests of Safety, Purposeful Activity and Resettlement awarded it the highest marking of Good. In the test of Respect it was awarded the second highest marking of Reasonably Good. The IMB shares this positive view of Thorn Cross, finding it to be a purposeful, well-run prison with strong leadership and a positive culture, providing a fair and decent service to prisoners.

4.1.2 The prison is now entering a period of further extensive and challenging change. In order to meet the demand of a changing prison population, Thorn Cross is raising its age profile and removing the upper age limit; this will be done in stages. The HIT unit is currently being reviewed in light of current commissioning intentions and work is underway to further develop Restorative Justice work undertaken at Thorn Cross. The opportunities for work outside the prison are being further expanded along with the opportunities for volunteering in the community. Paid work opportunities within the establishment will be developed with the first of these, provided by Max Spelman recently started. IMB is supportive of these plans, whilst also being mindful of the stresses placed on any organisation undergoing such major change. During the coming year the Board will pay particular attention to the impact of the changes on prisoners.

4.1.3 The prison has put in place an Action Plan to meet the recommendations of the Inspection Report. This plan will comprehensively address all those issues of current concern to the IMB and its implementation will be followed as part of the monitoring process in the coming year. For this reason, there are few additional points specifically for the attention of the prison in this report.

4.1.4 For the attention of the prison service.

A small proportion of prisoners arriving at Thorn Cross come from areas geographically distant. This makes successful re-settlement more difficult to achieve and runs counter to the purpose of an open establishment (ref. section 5.5.3).

For the attention of the prison

Efforts should be made to schedule activities in a way which maximises attendance of the prisoners on training and education activities so that these are run to capacity (ref. section 5.2.6).

4.1.5 Update on previous year's concerns

- Although some prisoners who are unsuitable for open conditions continue to arrive at Thorn Cross, there have been less than in previous years.

- Concerns about under-capacity have continued. The Management's decision to remove the upper age limit is designed to address this problem (ref. section 5.8.3).
- Appeals against adjudication which go to the Briefing and Casework unit in London can still take 3 or more weeks to obtain a response by which time any punishment given is likely to have been completed. Although a fast track approach is available and is used, this still does not always give a sufficiently fast response. There are very few appeals against adjudication in Thorn Cross so this is not a frequent problem, but is still of concern (ref. section 5.7.3).
- The Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) policy has been clarified and re-written and is now applied consistently across the prison. Consequently there has been a drop in Applications to the IMB about ROTL (ref section 5.5.1).
- Segregation, Monitoring and Review Group (SMARG) meetings are now held regularly (ref. section 5.7.4)

Section 5

REPORT ON REQUIRED AREAS

5.1 Equality and Inclusion

- 5.1.1. Thorn Cross is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity and holds The Investors in Diversity award. The monthly Race Equality Action Team meeting has been replaced by the Diversity and Equality Action Team (DEAT), which monitors Equality and Diversity targets and oversees relevant policy development. Prisoner representatives attend these meetings. Each area of diversity has an allocated staff member reporting to the DEAT.
- 5.1.2 Race Equality data is reviewed monthly at the DEAT meeting and the only area of concern is the persistent under-representation of black and minority ethnic prisoners accessing ROTL. This is a serious concern and the prison has, so far, been unable to identify any reason for this, despite an in-depth examination of the subject. Further and more in-depth analysis of the figures is on-going.
- 5.1.3 Work is taking place to provide accessible cells and showers on two units. The prison has excellent systems for identifying prisoners with learning disabilities, who receive strong educational support.
- 5.1.4 Gay and bi-sexual prisoners are well-supported and information on gay and bi-sexual issues is displayed. A comprehensive action plan has been produced on meeting the needs of gay and bi-sexual prisoners.
- 5.1.5 Travellers, gypsy and Romany prisoners receive specific support from the Roman Catholic chaplain.
- 5.1.6 A pleasing development is the creation of prisoner Diversity Mentors, who offer support to other prisoners on diversity and equality issues. Mentors all receive appropriate training.

5.2 Education, Learning and Skills

- 5.2.1 The last year has seen consolidation of earlier successes and planning for new regimes, anticipated as a result of reduced funding expectations following on from the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) 4 reviews. The Board is continually impressed by the high standard of education provision at Thorn Cross and the efforts of the dedicated team of tutors and staff to maximise the potential of the prisoners as individuals. The real sense of learning and achievement experienced by some of the prisoners is a major encouragement in this area.
- 5.2.2 The education programme is operated through the Skills Funding Agency and delivered by Manchester College. The target of 28,000 man hours has been achieved, as have the majority of other educational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and non –OLASS activity targets. The programme divides into the vocational training courses, primarily the workshops, and classroom based learning, the most important of which is the enhancement of reading and arithmetical skills, and the non OLASS activities which includes the Gym and sporting activities, and a variety of short and medium term evening classes.

- 5.2.3 On induction all prisoners are seen by Careers Information Advisory Service (CIAS) and an assessment of needs is made. All are asked for two choices in terms of educational and vocational classes and are then interviewed by Working Links / Connexions. The Board has concerns that these choices may be dominated by wishes rather than needs, particularly where numeracy and literacy are concerned, as the number of prisoners undertaking the “step up” courses on these subjects is very low. However, the Labour Board does its best to allocate courses according to wishes where possible. An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is created for each prisoner, which is a personal document to accompany each prisoner and to record his achievements and comments on performance for future reference. While progress has been made with these, their usage is variable and tutors have to insist on completion as many prisoners see little value in this activity. More work is required, by both prisoners and staff, to ensure that ILP compliance is improved.
- 5.2.4 The vocational training workshops include catering, bricklaying, painting and decorating, industrial cleaning, kitchen and bathroom fitting, car mechanics, farms and gardens and recycling. The course on kitchen and bathroom fitting is relatively new, and has proved popular, combining a number of different building skills. Qualifications are awarded by the Construction Awards Alliance to at least Diploma level 1. Prisoners are able to gain their CSCS green card. Facilities have been improved in a number of areas to facilitate teaching to level 2, and the increased theoretical inputs required, but most of these are awaiting completion or formal accreditation. The modular approach to the training has enabled prisoners who leave Thorn Cross before full course completion to have some permanent record of achievement. The Railway project, which provides opportunities for employment to suitable people after release has been running for three years, and is still very popular. It requires a significant commitment from prisoners in terms of behaviour and other academic achievements in order to be accepted onto it, and is a stimulus to the prison as a whole.
- 5.2.5 Prisoners with poor literacy and numeracy skills are identified during Induction and are offered one-to-one teaching and study group activity to rectify this. These “Step up” courses are essential for enabling prisoners to qualify for other activities and for jobs outside, but while the need is identified, completions are relatively low, which is disappointing. Computer literacy skill courses are popular and part time courses are provided in art and design, business administration, information technology (i-media) and social skills. The 'Family Links' and 'Life Skills' courses aim to build on previous courses and introduce further parenting skills. The 'Virtual Campus', for which there were high hopes initially, has only had limited success, primarily on account of slow broadband connections.
- 5.2.6 Difficulties in ensuring that courses are able to run when staff are off sick or on holiday have been largely resolved by the appointment of a peripatetic instructor, and access to two others who have a roving commission in the North West. They can either run courses for extended periods or help out in crisis situations. However, while Manchester College achieved 100% of its contracted hours during 2011-12, the courses were rarely operating to capacity, and while some of this is due to the relatively low roll within the prison, the majority of absence appears to be a result of higher priority activities imposed on the participants e.g. drugs programmes, court appearances, interviews etc. Whilst recognising the logistical difficulties of co-ordinating different demands, the Board is concerned with the loss of opportunity and efficiency incurred.
- 5.2.7 Farms and gardens ensure that the appearance of the prison is of a high standard. The old greenhouses have been demolished and reorganisation of the polytunnels

have led to significant quantities of produce being grown for domestic use and for sale outside the prison. The farm animals have migrated to a more convenient location and further ventures into productive crops are planned. The annual entry into Southport flower show, which again gained major awards, is an opportunity for the Prison to work as a team, engaging the Farms and Gardens, Art class and many of the workshops in providing a display of exceptionally high quality. The IMB was delighted that Thorn Cross won the Windelsham trophy for the best kept prison garden in September 2011, recognising the hard work of both staff and prisoners in this area.

- 5.2.8 The Library has been well used and has an enthusiastic team of staff who link closely with the local library service and are very willing to help prisoners get the most benefits from this service.
- 5.2.9 The gym, weights room and sports facilities are popular and a wider variety of sporting activities has been introduced during the reporting period. Removing the weights limits was a popular move within the prison, and significant events such as the Olympics are used as a basis for organising sporting events.
- 5.2.10 The prison is continuing to have significant successes in linking into the community with initiatives with the Halle Orchestra (Halle4brass), Warrington Wolves and the Gamelan project, which has been funded through the Big Lottery. It is hoped that this funding will be continued and the art classes have produced some excellent work to support the application process.
- 5.2.11 The successes of the year in the area of Learning and Skills were acknowledged in the HMIP inspection report. There were 6 relatively minor recommendations for the learning and skills area which the Board fully supports, and a programme for implementation of these recommendations is being developed.

5.3 Healthcare and Mental Health

- 5.3.1 Healthcare have had a challenging year providing a service despite protracted staff sickness. All clinics have continued by staff covering extra hours and support from the healthcare staff at HMP Risley. Access for prisoners to a GP and dentist is excellent with a GP attending daily Monday-Friday and a dentist weekly. Prisoners attend health services in the community for any ailment which needs further treatment. Counselling services are also provided.
- 5.3.2 Healthcare attained a new automated defibrillator during the year and all NHS employed staff are trained in its use and will receive annual updates on the machine to ensure all staff are competent to use it in a life threatening emergency. The decontamination area in the dental suite was refurbished during the year and meets all required standards required in the reprocessing of dental equipment. The vaccination and immunisation programme targets were all achieved. The health promotion service is active in providing a smoking cessation clinic every week, a Sexual health and Genito Urinary Clinic every 2 weeks.
- 5.3.3 Looking to the future the staff are working collaboratively with the discipline staff on the reprofiling of the prisoner's day to ensure that healthcare still provide a service where access to the prisoners complements the availability of the medical and nursing staff and also the provision of services with the increasing age range of offenders.

5.3.4 The department works collaboratively with other services such as CARATS. They have established good working relationships with healthcare staff at HMP Risley with nursing, IT for System One and Pharmacy.

5.4 **Purposeful Activity**

The comprehensive training and education opportunities described above provide sufficient places for the population and prisoners spend most of their time engaged in these activities. Work activities are to be expanded during the coming year. Prisoners in Thorn Cross spend most the time out of their cells.

5.5 **Resettlement**

5.5.1 As a category D prison, resettlement has a strong focus in Thorn Cross. ROTL is well used and previous inconsistencies in the application process have been resolved. Prisoners are able to progress through a system of town visits and home leave prior to release. There are good links with employers and education providers and opportunities for work-outs have continued to expand. Current plans build on this with planned progression through outside voluntary and paid work.

5.5.2 Thorn Cross is particularly successful at ensuring that prisoners have stable accommodation on release. Good use is made of agencies such as Working Links, Next Step, New Bridge and Jobcentre Plus.

5.5.3 Resettlement is obviously made more difficult when prisoners are located far from home and the IMB is concerned that prisoners from locations a long way from Cheshire continue to be sent to Thorn Cross. The removal of the age limit should address a general shortfall of Category D places in north-west prisons and the IMB hopes to see a reduction in prisoners placed from the south or distant north of England.

5.6 **Safer Custody**

5.6.1 The HMIP report noted that prisoners feel safe in Thorn Cross and this is echoed by the experience of the IMB. The atmosphere in the prison is generally relaxed with an absence of tension. Violence levels are low.

5.6.2 Bullying and antisocial behaviour is identified quickly and dealt with rigorously and creatively. Support for victims is good and responses include violence reduction workshops, restorative justice and mediation. Two prisoners who had been involved in mediation delivered an impressive presentation on the process to the Board, which made it clear that participation succeeded in changing their behaviour.

5.6.3 The number of Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork (ACCT) designations is low but is increasing and excellent support is offered to vulnerable prisoners. The past year has seen further development of the excellent Peer Mentor scheme, which provides advice and support to new prisoners and those who may be vulnerable. The mentors themselves gain confidence and self-esteem and give talks to people in the prison and outside. These are always very well received.

5.7 Care and Separation

- 5.7.1 Prisoners are confined to the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) following some misdemeanour or for their own protection – due to risk of self-harm or threats from other prisoners. All prisoners on arrival in CSU are seen by health care immediately after admission and then on a daily basis, and daily by a Governor. Numbers in the CSU vary considerably from day to day but have decreased significantly as growing emphasis is placed on retaining prisoners in their units wherever possible. Lengths of stay in the CSU are short with 10 days usually the longest stay and that only rarely. Staff in the unit provide a high standard of care and maintain good relationships with prisoners.
- 5.7.2 An officer contacts an IMB member whenever a prisoner is located to this unit and a Board member meets with each prisoner as soon as possible – usually within 24 hours. Prisoners in CSU are usually calm when seen by the IMB and rarely complain about the adjudication or their treatment in CSU. They have access to a shower, some of their property and an outside yard for exercise or a smoke.
- 5.7.3 Adjudications are routinely observed by members of the Board and are seen to be conducted fairly with appropriate punishments awarded. The trainees have sufficient time to prepare and are given every opportunity to speak for themselves at the adjudication. The Board is concerned that appeals against adjudications are now considered by the Briefing and Casework Unit in London and can take up to 3 or more weeks for a response to be received by which time the punishment has been served. Although a fast track appeals approach is possible through faxing etc., most punishments are of short duration so even a short turn round may be ineffective.
- 5.7.4 Segregation reviews are carried out routinely as required, and members of Healthcare are always present. A member of the IMB attends whenever possible. SMARG meetings now take place regularly.

5.8 Residential Services

- 5.8.1 The residential units are generally clean and well-maintained. There continue to be occasional problems with water pressure in showers and, during the winter, the heating in unit 3 was often not working properly. This needs to be remedied before the onset of winter this year. Additional telephones have been installed on units.
- 5.8.2 Food is generally good and any negative comments to the IMB tend to concern quantity not quality. The amount of food that leaves the kitchen is adequate for the numbers on the units so any shortfall stems from the servery. The Board is concerned that supervision at serveries is not always as rigorous as it needs to be. There have been some recent occasions when the special utensils for halal food have not always been used appropriately and this would also be remedied by closer server supervision.
- 5.8.3 Units have fairly consistently been operating under capacity despite efforts by managers to work proactively with feeder prisons. This is a disappointing waste of the expertise built up at Thorn Cross. Hopefully the removal of the age restrictions will remedy this.

Section 6

OTHER AREAS OF THE PRISON REGIME

6.1 Staff-prisoner relations and Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP)

- 6.1.1 Staff – prisoner relationships are generally good and the Board observe many relaxed, good-humoured and supportive interactions between staff and prisoners. Where there are problems they are dealt with swiftly. In the earlier part of the year the IMB was concerned about deteriorating relationships on one specific unit with rising levels of tension. This was also evidenced through a rapid rise in applications to the IMB from this unit. The prison management responded quickly and decisively and the situation was resolved. There are no continuing concerns from the Board regarding this unit and the number of applications has reverted to normal.
- 6.1.2 There is some inconsistency between prison staff in the use of IEPs, with a small number of staff issuing warnings for relatively trivial misbehaviour that would not generally result in a warning. Applications to the Board about IEPs and warnings have significantly increased this year. This issue was also highlighted in the Inspection report. The prison management have responded to this and all IEP boards are monitored on a monthly basis. The issue is addressed in the Action Plan for the Inspection Report.

6.2 Substance misuse

All prisoners are assessed on arrival and if necessary are referred to CARATS for counselling. Prisoners may self-refer at any time. The CARAT workers provide an excellent service which is valued by prisoners. Cannabis remains the most common drug used in Thorn Cross as proved by mandatory drug tests. In recent months, cannabis use has decreased with a consequent increase in the use of 'legal highs' such as Black Mamba, which cannot be identified by existing drug tests. Work is in place to identify and source tests which will identify these new drugs.

6.3 Chaplaincy

The Board would like to note the positive contribution made by the Thorn Cross Chaplaincy team. As well as catering for a wide range of faiths, their work in providing Family Days and Restorative Justice programmes greatly enhances the life of prisoners. The Sycamore Tree programme continues to be successful and the Chaplaincy team is particularly enterprising in obtaining sources of funding to enable this to continue. Chaplaincy have involvement with DEAT, safer custody and Child Protection. They also provide a Care Team staff member and a Care Team Co-ordinator and two members of staff are ACCT assessors.

Section 7

THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

7.1 Board Statistics

Recommended Complement of Board Members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	11
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	3
Number of members leaving within reporting period	1
Total number of Board meetings during reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	441

7.2 Applications to the Board

Code	Subject	Number
A	Accommodation	4
B	Adjudications	0
C	Equality & Diversity (including religion)	1
D	Education/employment/training	8
E 1	Family/visits including mail & phone	3
E 2	Finance/pay	0

F	Food/kitchen related	2
G	Health related	2
H 1	Property (within current establishment)	4
H 2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	2
H 3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	0
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	18
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc bullying	31 *
K	Transfers	2
L	Miscellaneous	2
	total	79

*17of the 31 were received within a short time period at the end of last year and came from one unit as discussed in section 6.1.1.

7.3 The Monitoring Process

7.3.1 Rota visits take place each week usually by a pair of Board members and a written report completed. Findings are shared at the monthly meetings and discussed with the Governor. If there are matters of significance, a Governor is contacted immediately and the response received by the Governors is usually excellent.

7.3.2 Historically few formal applications were received by the IMB, with most being picked up 'on the hoof' and dealt with immediately. As an older age group was admitted, formal written applications increased and this trend is likely to continue with the planned removal of the upper age limit. The last Annual Report identified a need to establish a more rigorous system for receiving applications so as to effectively manage this increase. This is now in place. Board members collect applications when they attend for rota visits, induction or other reasons and deal with them as swiftly as possible. 'On the hoof' approaches continue and the new system ensures that these are also properly recorded.

7.3.3 Board members have individual responsibilities for areas of special interest and attend meetings as observers, e.g. Safer Custody, DEAT, Prisoner Representatives, SMARG etc.

7.4 Induction

The prison runs induction courses for new prisoners on a twice weekly basis. As part of each programme the new prisoners are seen by a Board member who tells them about the work of the IMB and how they can be contacted. Planned changes to

introduce a shorter induction programme will result in this slot being cut and the Board is concerned at the potential loss of this face-to-face introduction to new prisoners. Experience indicates that this does facilitate prisoners feeling able to approach the IMB and the Board will work to identify different ways of meeting new prisoners.

7.5 Training and Development

7.5.1 The National Training programme is used as the basis for training members of the Board. Members have attended the appropriate courses as their roles change and develop and all three new members attended the New Members course. All the National courses attended have been well received and found to be most useful. A Board member attended the National Conference. Members of the Board had a useful and informative visit to HMP Forest Bank. Board meetings usually start with a short presentation by a member of the prison staff on their area of activity and the issues which they face. These have proved very informative and useful. Various internal courses arranged at Thorn Cross have also been attended.

7.5.2 Due to the need to induct and integrate three new members, there was no Annual Team Performance Review last year but a date has been set for this year.

7.6 Support

The Board is grateful for the efficiency, hard work and cheerful support from the Board Secretary and all the support staff at the prison who are always eager to help and provide information and advice where necessary.