



**Independent Monitoring Board**

# **HMP &YOI Thorn Cross**

## **Annual Report May 2013– April 2014**

Thorn Cross logo here

## Section 1

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### 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**

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## Section 3

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### DESCRIPTION OF PRISON

- 3.1.1 HMP &YOI Thorn Cross is located in Appleton on the outskirts of Warrington, within a residential area and adjacent to a primary school. It was purpose built in 1985 as an open establishment for male juvenile and young offenders and now has a capacity for 336 prisoners in 7 units across the whole age range, and includes Lifers and those with IPP sentences. It was re-rolled in 2008 to become a prison for 18 to 25 year old men. Due to the decrease in numbers of prisoners aged under 25, this upper age limit was removed in 2013. One 60 bed unit is retained for Young Offenders. Prisoners who have been categorised as Cat D, suitable for open conditions and nearing the end of the sentence are accepted at Thorn Cross with the objective of rehabilitation into the community.
- 3.1.2 In January 2013 the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) closed and has been redeveloped to provide additional accommodation which is used for prisoners when they first arrive at Thorn Cross. The cessation of the High Intensity training (HIT) operations based on Unit 5 has led to closure of their separate education and training facilities and consideration is being given to converting this building to provide further accommodation.
- 3.1.3 There are 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, and Parenting etc. These have undergone revision in response to the changing population age range. Counselling for drug use is provided by Pathways; this was previously done by Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare (CARATS) and there is a comprehensive resettlement programme. Workouts are a key part of this programme, through Community Service or work placements outside the prison. Additional work opportunities are being introduced to reflect the needs of the older population. Max Spielman and Timpson have opened workshops on site for suitable prisoners and negotiations are underway with Eddie Stobart to provide further work placements.
- 3.1.3 The gym and weights room and the playing fields offer a wide variety of sports.
- 3.1.4 Training and education is provided by Manchester College. Healthcare is commissioned by NHS England and provided by Bridgewater Community Services and 5 Boroughs Mental Health Partnership. Prisoners' transport is provided by GeoAmey with an increasing proportion through the use of the prison's own vehicles.

## Section 4

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 4.1.1 2013-2014 has been another year of enormous change for Thorn Cross and this will be the focus of the annual report. The removal of the upper age limit at Thorn Cross rapidly led to a much wider population distribution. This inevitably brought challenges which required a response across all levels from residences to workshops and education to cater for an older and more mature population. At the same time, the prison was having to respond to the requirements of Fair and Sustainable and Benchmarking and manage changes such as the closure of the CSU segregation and developing the accommodation to accept new prisoners. Cumulatively this placed significant demands on staff. It is a tribute to the governors and staff that throughout this period Thorn Cross continued to provide a fair and decent environment for prisoners within a positive and purposeful culture. There have been many challenges, which have been met with a positive and pro-active approach but there are still concerns that staffing levels, in particular at nights and weekends, have little or no margin for error, and some activities are routinely curtailed through staff non availability.
- 4.1.2 When the prison population age range was increased older prisoners frequently complained of being “treated like kids” and not being given the full freedom they expected at a category D prison. These issues have now largely disappeared following consultation meetings and changes which were acceptable and easy to implement were introduced quickly. Longer term changes which were acceptable were agreed and prisoners updated at the regular prisoner representative meetings at which a member of the IMB is present. This pro-active approach meant that prisoners felt listened to and could see difficulties getting resolved. This year, the number of applications the Board has received relating to these issues has been extremely low.
- 4.1.3 Whilst Thorn Cross has now adapted well to providing for the full age range, the IMB is concerned that the excellent practice developed over the years of working with young offenders in an open environment could be lost to the prison system. It is important that the one unit reserved for YOs remains at capacity and that YO establishments continue to identify prisoners suitable for Thorn Cross.
- 4.1.4 The changes in the age profile at the prison and the introduction of Offender Learning and Skills Service 4 (OLASS 4) has led to both disruption and very positive progress within the prison regimes, particularly where the areas of education and training, workouts and resettlement are concerned. These will be reported on in the relevant sections below.
- 4.1.5 Release on Temporary License (ROTL) is a key feature of the regime at Thorn Cross and of the resettlement process. Establishing the acceptability of a prisoner for ROTL is a complex process involving many interacting departments and external agencies so it is unsurprising that delays can occur and prisoner frustration at not obtaining ROTL when expected can be high. Over a third of all applications received by the Board concerned ROTL issues. There have been many changes around ROTL policies and procedures recently, largely due to National policy changes. It is important that the ROTL process is as open and transparent to the prisoners as possible and that they are kept informed of progress, so as not to suffer the disappointment of failure to achieve ROTL at the last moment.

- 4.1.6 Expectations of Prisoners arriving at an open resettlement prison such as Thorn Cross are usually high and disappointment is sometimes expressed about restrictive regimes, and inconsistencies with closed prisons and privately run prisons, particularly in regard to personal property, wages, and petty rules and regulations. While every prison operates independently within prison service guidelines, a greater level of consistency across the whole estate would be beneficial.
- 4.1.7 The Fair and Sustainable and Benchmarking activities at Thorn Cross have been largely completed and have led to significant staff reorganisation and a number of redundancies. The reduced staffing levels has led to the need for increased flexibility which in turn has meant that staff are less familiar with many of their new roles and have become less involved and therefore less well informed about the prisoners with whom they have contact. The Sentence Planning activities through the Offender Manager Unit is an area of particular concern with difficulties of communication between prisoners and their offender supervisors. The reduced staffing levels on units may be perceived as a potential security risk, although improved surveillance systems compensate for this in part. More importantly, a number of the fringe activities are being curtailed e.g. gym at weekends and cancellation of Community Service Volunteering if staff are required to stand in for absences elsewhere, and the loss of an officer through illness, or the need to escort a prisoner, may lead to a major disruption of activities across the whole establishment.
- 4.1.8 There were no formal or unannounced prison inspections during the reporting period.
- 4.1.9 The main concerns are as follows

For the attention of the Governor

- The lines of communication between the OMU/offender supervisors and the prisoners should be improved to ensure that prisoners receive accurate and timely information on issues related to their sentence and ROTL arrangements. (ref section 5.5.1)
- The proximity of the prison to the local community and school has led to concerns over safety and security, particularly now the prison takes a wider range of age groups and variety of offenders. Links with the local community should be strengthened to ensure that the implications of developments at Thorn Cross are known about and understood.(ref section 5.5.3)
- While the number of complaints about food is currently relatively low, the food comments books and the way they are monitored and responded to could be improved, although the use of Food Focus groups is to be commended (ref section 5.8.2, 5.8.3)

### For the attention of the prison service

- The Facilities List (items which prisoners are allowed to hold in their possession) should be consistent across prison categories and implemented fairly and equitably across the prison. (ref. section 5.8.4)
- Prisoners are arriving at Thorn Cross from other establishments without complete documentation and training certificates which are often difficult and time consuming to obtain later. (ref. section 5.2.3)
- The introduction of new working regimes for prison staff as a consequence of Benchmarking and Fair and Sustainable has led to reduced opportunities for communication between prisoners and staff and less satisfactory relationships, as well as a curtailment of some of the activities which affect prisoner morale and the resettlement process as a whole. (ref sections 6.1.1 & 6.4).
- The education and training budgets severely limit the amount that can be spent at Thorn Cross to improve literacy and numeracy skills. While these issues are supposedly addressed at previously attended establishments, this is not always the case, and increased provision at Thorn Cross is required. (ref section 5.2.3)
- Transfers between prisons in the north and south of the country appear to be difficult to arrange which leads to frustration for prisoners and their families. The detrimental influence this has on maintaining family relationships and the consequent negative effect on successful rehabilitation is of concern. (ref section 7.2.5).

### Update on previous year's concerns

- Some progress has been made in the concerns highlighted in previous annual reports, but many of the issues remain.
- Prisoners continue to arrive at Thorn Cross from geographically distant areas but not as frequently as in previously. Transfers to other prisons appear to be less of a problem.
- Education and training provision has been revised under the new OLASS 4 regime to be outcomes driven, but it is still disappointing to find many vocational and education courses under occupied and prisoners missing sessions through other higher priority appointments. (ref. section 5.2.4).

## Section 5

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### REPORT ON REQUIRED AREAS

#### 5.1 Equality and Inclusion

- 5.1.1 The Diversity and Equality Action Team (DEAT) meets routinely and monitors Equality and Diversity targets and oversees relevant policy development. There is no longer any staff member specifically dedicated to these activities. However, each area of diversity has an allocated staff member reporting to the DEAT and efforts have been made to ensure staff are identified and prepared for the roles despite Fair and Sustainable personnel changes, although other priorities often lead to the meetings being poorly attended. Meetings are chaired at senior level, and outcomes combined into a plan so as not to lose sight of actions required.
- 5.1.2 Many of the social identities at Thorn Cross have low numbers. However, now the age range has changed, there is active consideration of monitoring by age and of conducting an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in respect of age.
- 5.1.4 Discrimination Incident Report Forms (DIRFs) are being received and dealt with appropriately. Often prisoners are not clear when or how to submit one and steps are being taken to publicise the process.
- 5.1.5 Prisoner representatives sometimes attend DEAT meetings and contribute, raising concerns on behalf of others and their points are given a good hearing, even when not strictly on equality and diversity.
- 5.1.6 A less positive development is the (nationally driven) replacement of face to face group training for staff (and IMB members) in Equality and Diversity by online material, which may risk losing some of the benefits of staff interaction and mutual challenge in the former sessions.

#### 5.2 Education, Learning and Skills

- 5.2.1 OLASS 4 is based on the Manchester College agreement to achieve outcomes rather than just to provide time, and this has enabled more focus on ensuring that the qualifications gained are relevant and achievable and that records of these are properly maintained. Non-OLASS activities have been similarly targeted, with suitable qualifications identified for the Gym, Farms and Gardens etc. Coupled with this have been significant budget cuts and staff redundancy or redeployment resulting in some courses being suspended, so morale has had its ups and downs, and staff are to be congratulated on maintaining a high level of enthusiasm in these difficult times.
- 5.2.2 The older prisoner population requires different approaches; many already have a considerable skill base and work ethic, and the old approach of cycling through courses is inappropriate. The focus is now on an initial assessment, identification of training needs, provision of this training, followed by work outs, either through Community Voluntary Service (CVS) or paid work placements, which may be able to continue after release. Some of these have been outstandingly successful, and most do lead to prisoners leaving Thorn Cross with worthwhile skills and certificates.
- 5.2.3 Disappointingly, prisoners are still arriving at Thorn Cross without the certificates gained at other establishments and the basic literacy and numeracy skills, which are

now supposed to have been addressed before arrival, can be still lacking. The one-to-one tuition in this area is now no longer funded, but efforts are being made to improve the competence of the disadvantaged prisoners in this key area.

- 5.2.4 The Individual Learning Plans scheme, which it was hoped would have made recognition of achievement and recording of progress for prisoners clearer has been revised. Training modules are recorded electronically through the OCR exam board and it should be possible to pick up courses where they have been left off at other establishments. While the new target-orientated delivery of courses can allow for absences of both prisoners and tutors on an occasional basis, it is still disappointing to find that many of the workshop sessions are under occupied and prisoners are frequently diverted elsewhere. The use of block modules where priority is established and attendance virtually guaranteed will help to ensure that tutor and prisoner time is used effectively. The 'learner journey' plan which is established between the prisoner and his offender supervisor depends much more on the input from the prisoner in terms of needs and wishes, and it is at this stage that any learning difficulties have to be identified and actioned.
- 5.2.5 The older age range of prisoners has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of books borrowed from the library. A Library Orderly position has been introduced and a new library management system will begin shortly.
- 5.2.6 Prisoners are now able to do the CSCS test, which is essential for obtaining work in the building sector, thanks to a mobile vehicle supported by Carillion. A new NVQ level 1 course in Warehousing and Distribution has been introduced.
- 5.2.7 The Virtual Campus, which will provide an important capability within education and training, has been commissioned. A full time Learning support practitioner was appointed in April and various sessions are proposed which may make better uses of resources and appeal to older generation.

### **5.3 Healthcare and Mental Health**

- 5.3.1 The Healthcare unit has continued to provide services throughout the year rising to the challenge of the changing age profile of prisoners. The impact on the service necessitated reducing the number of consultations by the General Practitioner to allow more time per consultation as older prisoners bring more complex medical history and problems. To enhance the service there are now 2 sessions per week at Thorn Cross by the Advanced Nurse Practitioner based at HMP Risley to complement the General Practitioner service. There are also clinics by the Diabetic Nurse Specialist and the Specialist Hepatitis C Nurse. Bridgewater Community Services provides a Sexual Health Clinic every two weeks. The closure of the CSU has released more clinical time as health staff no longer need to hold medical reviews following admissions to the unit.
- 5.3.2 During the year due a new the Dental practitioner was appointed resulting in reduced waiting times for dental care.
- 5.3.3 Nurse staffing has been problematic with staff leaving and time taken to recruit but at times of pressure assistance is provided by HMP Risley. The contract for the provision of healthcare is currently being reviewed by NHS England and it is anticipated that it will be being re commissioned sometime during 2015.

5.3.4 The impact of the changing age profile has seen an increase in the numbers of patients being referred out to hospital for treatment for long term conditions, and physiotherapy and a resulting increase in spending on medications. In possession medications is currently under review.

5.3.5 The staff within the unit are actively working towards developing Chronic Disease Management clinics to respond to the needs of the older prisoners. This will include the development of Cardio Vascular Disease, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Vaccination and Epilepsy specialist clinics. It is planned that staff will attend the appropriate training to implement these developments. Staff have attended all the appropriate mandatory and statutory training.

#### 5.4 **Purposeful Activity**

5.4.1 The comprehensive training and education opportunities described above, along with increasing work activities provide sufficient places for the population and prisoners spend most of their time engaged in these activities. Approximately 20% of prisoners are on workouts of various sorts and the numbers of prisoners involved in Unit cleaning has decreased. Prisoners in Thorn Cross spend most of the time out of their cells.

#### 5.5 **Resettlement**

5.5.1 As a category D prison, resettlement has always been a strong focus of the work in Thorn Cross. This is being further strengthened through the development of the 'prisoner journey' and a more focussed role for the Offender Supervisors. The intention is for all prisoners to follow a path of town visits, home visits, CVS placements in the community and work placements in the community. A clearer and streamlined process of Release on Temporary License (ROTL) is being developed to enable this. A rigorous risk assessment process accompanies this, but the systems required to achieve this are complex and involve multiple agency involvement, and these can lead to delays and subsequent disappointment to prisoners who do not achieve their aspirations on the timescales expected. The OMU work hard to process the proposals but communications with prisoners on progress in this area are the subject of numerous applications to the board, and efforts to reduce these concerns would be desirable.

5.5.2 Thorn Cross has developed a number of successful partnerships with organisations concerned with housing and employment, which contribute to a positive future for prisoners when they leave. These include National Careers, Achieve, Job Centre Plus and Shelter. Housing outcomes are particularly impressive with only one prisoner who has left in the past year having no address to go to (and he declined the help offered by Shelter). The target of 36% or over was reached for prisoners going into employment and this has been increased to 43% in the coming year. It has been more difficult to secure places for prisoners in further education, with 13% having been achieved, although this has been made more difficult by the increase in age range. Staff are trying to find ways of improving on this.

5.5.3 Thorn Cross is located within a residential area and adjacent to a primary school. Significant changes have been made at the prison in terms of re-rolling, changes age ranges and taking prisoners with Life or IPP sentences. The local community has expressed concerns about not being informed of these changes and the level of risks involved, and this has led to undesirable and adverse publicity. Actions have been taken to improve links with the local community, and these should be encouraged.

## 5.6 Safer Custody

- 5.6.1 The experience of the IMB is that prisoners feel safe in Thorn Cross and certainly violence levels are very low. 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. For those prisoners who are reluctant to conform are moved back to closed conditions. A member of the IMB attends the bi monthly meetings.
- 5.6.2 There are some concerns, highlighted by applications received, which suggest that prisoners may feel that they are being “got at” or are being unfairly treated by Staff. The prison management is aware of this concern, and values the Board input in identifying any cases requiring further investigation.
- 5.6.3 The number of Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork (ACCT) designations is low and excellent support is offered to vulnerable prisoners. The Peer Mentor scheme 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.
- 5.6.4 One example of good practice is encouragement for mentors to offer support to prisoners having their first town visits or home leaves as it had been noticed that some long-term prisoners were finding the experience unsettling.

## 5.7 Care and Separation

- 5.7.1 The Care and Separation unit was closed in January 2013 and the accommodation changed to accept new reception prisoners to an open establishment, an approach which appears to be working extremely well, although the prisoners may have to share cells, which have non screened facilities.
- 5.7.2 Adjudications still take place in designated rooms within one of the residential units. Adjudications are routinely observed by members of the Board and are seen to be conducted fairly with appropriate punishments awarded. The prisoners have sufficient time to prepare and are given every opportunity to speak for themselves at the adjudication.
- 5.7.3 The decision to close the CSU was taken after much thought and in response to a number of issues. The population of older prisoners tend to be calmer and less volatile than younger ones. Numbers in the CSU were declining with the unit sometimes being empty. Thus maintaining the unit ceased to be a good use of resources. Most Category D prisons operate without a closed unit and from January 2013 Thorn Cross has also done so, with no apparent consequential issues. Should an incident require isolation of prisoners prior to shipment to closed institutions, temporary arrangements can be made within the units.

## 5.8 Residential Services

- 5.8.1 The residential units are generally clean and well-maintained. Vandalism has decreased with the influx of older prisoners and the Works department is able to keep on top of any maintenance issues.
- 5.8.2 Complaints received by the IMB related to food have been relatively low this year, the changes made in 2012-13 having resolved some of the issues related to portion size – through use of individually packaged portions- and a system is in place where both

- 5.8.3 Food focus groups with the prisoners meet every two months to discuss menus and resolve issues. Changes were made in March 2013 when a cooked meal at lunchtime was replaced by sandwiches and rolls. Complaints about the quantity and quality of the fillings were resolved, as have been individual prisoner issues related to special diets. Special efforts are made for Ramadan and the kitchens and server operations are designed to separate Halal from non Halal foods. Given the limits on expenditure on food the kitchen staff do a very good job and the IMB's recent observations on rota visits are that the food is sufficient and of adequate quality. The older prisoners are able to provide better longer term support in the kitchen and organisational issues appear to have been resolved. However, there is a concern that some units are not using the Food comments books effectively and while a Governor may note the comments, there may be no actions resulting from these.
- 5.8.4 The IMB regularly receives complaints from prisoners that they are not allowed to bring in items which they have been allowed at previous prisons, and some items containing USB ports have fallen foul of these rules, which are based on risk assessments. The problems are caused by the fact that previous prisons have taken different decisions, and this understandably causes confusion and resentment for prisoners.
- 5.8.5 The change in age range has resulted in Thorn Cross operating nearer to capacity and this is pleasing. One unit is retained for Young Offenders and the IMB would like to see this always operating at capacity to ensure that YOs continue to benefit from the considerable experience and skills with this age group which have been built up at Thorn Cross.
- 5.8.6 Further developments are planned in Residential Services. The Independent Living Unit is fully operational and the conversion of the old HIT Education Department into more independent living accommodation is planned.

## Section 6

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### 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. The atmosphere is usually calm and tension virtually non-existent, but there is no doubt that staff are sometimes under pressure to resolve problems in areas where they are unfamiliar – the consequence of more flexible working being that staff move much more between units and areas. Many of the problems the Unit staff have to deal with in the Front Office relate to ROTL and often these Staff can only refer the prisoners to the OMU and their offender supervisor, who may be unavailable. Closer links between the OMU and the Units would be very desirable to minimise some of these issues.
- 6.1.2 Prisoners from each unit participate in monthly consultation meetings, chaired by a Governor and attended by a member of the IMB where issues of concern are raised and discussed. These are effective, prisoners feel listened to, even though they do not always get what they want. Staff have adjusted to the different needs and demands of older men, and the majority of prisoners feel that Thorn Cross is a good place to be.
- 6.1.3 There are inconsistencies between staff in the use of IEP warnings and this causes frustration but since the Governor introduced a “tariff” the inconsistencies are diminishing. The introduction of the new IEP regime at the end of 2013 has had little impact on Thorn Cross as most prisoners are on Enhanced Status.

#### 6.2 Substance misuse

- 6.2.1 The raised age profile of the prison has seen changing drug treatment requirements and needs: whereas the younger population required a focus on education and harm reduction, the arrival of older prisoners has seen a shift of focus towards abstinence.
- 6.2.2 The caseload for the “Pathways” team remains relatively stable, approximately a third of prisoners are actively engaged in working with the team. The team have seen two thirds of the prisoner population due to an alcohol or substance misuse problem issue at some point during their stay. The common referrals are for cocaine, cannabis and alcohol. There is now more need for alcohol and opiate treatment and the team is trying to get NA (Narcotics Anonymous) and AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) in to support those who could benefit from their services. The most popular drugs for use prior to custody remain alcohol, cocaine and cannabis with some ‘legal high’ use which remains a concern for the prison as the chemical compounds are constantly changing and tests are not successful in identifying the substance. There are a few prisoners on methadone treatment programmes.
- 6.2.3 Although currently understaffed and awaiting a number of appointments to be finalised the team are working hard to launch “Partners in Parenting” programme and restart the “Foundations to Recovery” programme alongside existing group work which includes Smoking Cessation and substance misuse awareness. They are also running an independent living course relating to housing issues in preparation towards release.

### 6.3 **Chaplaincy**

6.3.1 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 and providing invaluable individual support to prisoners when needed, 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. The team help to organise activities and concerts provided by outside groups. Recruitment for a Roman Catholic priest has been successful following the retirement of the previous chaplain, and a long term absence due to major surgery has been managed effectively, although the team has been hard pressed.

### 6.4 **Gym**

6.4.1 The gym and weights room provide a focus for leisure and training activities and are very popular. Stricter controls have been imposed on the casual use of these facilities which are not an alternative to planned activities for the prisoners. However there is a concern that use of the Gym and other facilities at weekends is being curtailed if supervisory staff have to be detailed for duties elsewhere through absence or illness.

## 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 | 10           |
| Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period   | 9            |
| Number of new members joining within the reporting period    | 0            |
| Number of members leaving within reporting period            | 1            |
| Total number of Board meetings during reporting period       | 12           |
| Total number of visits to the Establishment                  | 262          |
| <b>Date of Annual Team Performance Review</b>                | October 2014 |

\*Although the official Board complement is 12, the Board consider 10 to be the optimum number in present circumstances. With one member due to retire at the end of 2014 through tenure and another proposing to retire, the board is currently seeking to recruit a further three members.

The stable nature of the board and lack of identifiable issues following implementation of the board team performance review action plan in October 2012 led to a decision to defer the next TPR to the autumn 2014

The total number of visits to the prison is significantly less than that in the previous reporting period. This is primarily due to the removal of the contribution that the IMB made to the new prisoner induction process which took place twice per week. As the majority of prisoners are already aware of the work of the IMB through contacts at previous establishments, this is acceptable, but efforts are made to ensure that IMB information literature and application

forms are readily available on the Units, particularly on Unit 6, where new arrivals are initially housed.

## 7.2 Applications to the Board

### 7.2.1 Statistics

| Code | Subject  | 2011-12   | 2012-13    | 2013- 14  |
|------|--|-----------|------------|-----------|
| A    | Accommodation  | 4         | 6          | 1         |
| B    | Adjudications  | 0         | 4          | 14        |
| C    | Equality & Diversity (inc religion)                                  | 1         | 2          | 2         |
| D    | Education/employment/training inc IEP                                | 8         | 10         | 4         |
| E 1  | Family/visits inc mail & phone                                       | 3         | 2          | 0         |
| E 2  | Finance/pay  | 0         | 5          | 6         |
| F    | Food/kitchen related   | 2         | 8          | 3         |
| G    | Health related   | 2         | 5          | 5         |
| H 1  | Property (within current establishment)                              | 4         | 5          | 1         |
| H 2  | Property (during transfer/in another establishment)                  | 2         | 8          | 5         |
| H 3  | Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos                       | 0         | 1          | 1         |
| I    | Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc) | 18        | 24         | 32        |
| J    | Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc bullying                        | 31        | 13         | 7         |
| K    | Transfers  | 2         | 11         | 10        |
| L    | Miscellaneous  | 2         | 5          | 2         |
|      | <b>Total number of IMB applications</b>                              | <b>79</b> | <b>109</b> | <b>90</b> |

- 7.2.2 These applications are received fairly uniformly throughout the year, although there are spikes if a particular issue has an adverse effect on prisoner life. It is not always easy to categorise applications as many of them cross the definitions, e.g. a prisoner might believe that a difficult relationship with an officer results in an unfair use of IEP warnings or leads to a ROTL ban. Where this is the case, applications have been categorised under the core issue. The list includes both written applications and those which are picked up 'on the hoof' and written up by the IMB member with the prisoner.
- 7.2.3 As reported earlier, the largest proportion of applications are related to ROTL and in particular the apparent lack of communication regarding the likely outcome leading to prisoner expectations which are unfulfilled. This can lead to visitors being unable to take prisoners on town visits or home leave being cancelled and consequent aggravation. Dissatisfaction with treatment and punishments resulting from adjudications has shown a very significant rise over the last year, with many citing varying punishments for similar misdemeanours or excessively harsh punishments which have had significant knock on effects else where eg ROTL bans leading to loss of employment outside and inability to complete sentence planning objectives. The Board has usually found that there have been good reasons for varying levels of punishment, the full facts of comparable cases being unknown to the prisoners, but there is a concern that there is the possibility of some governors being harsher than others. Adjudications are attended routinely, and punishments reviewed for consistency by the senior Governor, and we have no hard evidence of any specific trends.
- 7.2.4 The applications related to staff/prisoner relationships, food, and transfers are dealt with elsewhere in this report. Concern around Equality & Diversity, Property, Accommodation, Visits and Canteen etc were at a very low level.
- 7.2.5 The significant rise in applications regarding transfer reflects the increasing problem in obtaining a transfer between prisons in the north and south of the country. This can result in some prisoners experiencing great difficulty in maintaining family contacts, which has a detrimental effect on rehabilitation.

### **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 is completed, which goes to the Governor. 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 is usually excellent. Most issues raised by prisoners can be sorted out during the rota visit or within the following few days, and a verbal or written response given.
- 7.3.2 The change in age range presented challenges for the IMB as well as prison staff. Many older prisoners come to Thorn Cross towards the end of a long sentence and are very familiar with and knowledgeable about the prison system. Whereas young offenders often prefer to approach a Board member in person, whilst on rota, and need time to explain their problem, older prisoners usually make a formal written application and are clearer and more articulate about their issue. The Board has had

to adapt to having more written applications from more knowledgeable prisoners, sometimes raising more complex issues.

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 Public Protection etc.

7.3.4 Until spring 2013, a Board member participated in the induction programme for new prisoners. Changes in the induction process mean this is no longer the case and information leaflets are now issued when prisoners are transferred. Older prisoners on longer sentences usually know about the IMB and its role, this is not the case for Young Offenders. In order to fill this gap in knowledge, the Board members on rota now ensure that they always visit the unit for YOs, finding out how many new prisoners have arrived that week and trying to be as visible as possible.

## 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. Two Board members attended the National Conference. 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, especially during periods of change. The Team Performance Review in October 2012 helped to develop a plan to meet the new challenges being faced by the change in age range and has largely been implemented.

## 7.6 **Support**

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