



# Annual Report HMP Thameside

1 July 2014 – 30 June 2015



## 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 they have 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 THE PRISON

- 3.1 HMP Thameside opened in 2012 as a Category B local prison, with an operational capacity of 900. Part way through the reporting year (April 2015), an extension opened with an additional capacity of 332, intended for resettlement prisoners (mainly Category C) close to their release date. Prior to April 2015 the prison was always occupied close to capacity, holding a mixture of convicted and remand prisoners. It generally held about 100 young offenders, mostly on remand.
- 3.2 The prison benefits from being modern and purpose-built. All cells have integrated toilets and showers, a telephone and in-cell information technology for communication within the prison. Prisoners can opt 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 and surgeries for out-patient consultations.
- 3.3 There is a well-equipped sports academy, a library, an education centre, a multi-faith centre and, since it opened in April 2015, a large activity centre with workshops, classrooms and the potential to accommodate a range of activities suitable for resettlement prisoners.
- 3.4 The prison is managed under contract by Serco Group plc. It has two partner agencies, Catch 22 (focusing on offender management) and Turning Point (issues arising from drug and alcohol misuse).
- 3.5 A range of other centrally contracted organisations provide other services. Education provision was contracted to A4E during the first part of the reporting year; The Manchester College took over in spring 2015. Healthcare was contracted to Care UK until April 2015, when the Oxleas NHS Trust took over. Career information and advice has been provided by Prospects. The Community Rehabilitation Company, appointed in spring 2015, is MTC Novo. The escort contractor is Serco Wincanton.

## Section 4

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### SUMMARY

#### Overview of 2014/15

- 4.1 During the reporting year, HMP Thameside has been inspected by HMIP (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons), received the report of a 'Chaplaincy HQ Assurance and Compliance Check' and been subject to audit visits (e.g. fire safety, security, food hygiene). The consistent message from all these experts is that HMP Thameside has developed into a good prison ('outcomes for prisoners are reasonably good – no significant concerns'; 'meets the majority of performance targets'), with some outstanding features as well as other areas where improvement is desirable.
- 4.2 The IMB, from its independent viewpoint, shares the overall conclusion. Our monitoring has found that the prison continued its rapid development during the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. It is an establishment where prisoners are treated properly. When there are instances or incidents where standards fall, prison managers respond decisively. Much good work has been done.
- 4.3 A prison's effectiveness depends on the quality of its staff. HMP Thameside is a young establishment. Many of its staff are newly trained and inexperienced. During 2014/15 it has recruited and trained to the required level, or higher, the extra people needed to run an extension that increases the prison's capacity by about one third, which opened in April 2015, as well as those needed to cover staff turnover. A positive development during the year has been the training and promotion, on merit, of some 'home grown' prison custody officers to unit manager posts.
- 4.4 The IMB's monitoring finds that the commitment, care and developing skills of its staff – at all levels – are a signal strength of the prison.
- 4.5 The IMB finds that there are three common causes when performance weaknesses occur. They are communication, communication and communication:
- (i) communication between staff and prisoners over individual issues concerning the prisoner (such as his property or his post or his medical care);
  - (ii) communication between staff, both during handovers and between different units in the prison, especially in the context of managing individual prisoner issues; and
  - (iii) communication between prison managers and managers of some contracted services (e.g. providers of education and skills, healthcare, community rehabilitation) and the commissioners of those services in the public sector.
- 4.6 There are several important riders to these criticisms.
- (i) In some areas communication is outstandingly good. Information technology is used to ensure that prisoners collectively are well informed about events that may impact their lives (e.g. a planned power cut). In-cell telephones enable prisoners to maintain good contact with their families.
  - (ii) In the areas where inadequate communication has been highlighted, failures are the exception, not the rule.
  - (iii) When communication is poor the cause is failure to give it priority, not careless irresponsibility.
- 4.7 Poor communication, whenever and wherever it occurs, diminishes the quality of prisoners' experiences in ways that almost inevitably impact their preparation for release and rehabilitation.

## Progress during 2014/15

- 4.8 HMP Thameside made visible progress during 2014/15. In partnership with Skanska, accommodation for 332 prisoners and an activity block were constructed and commissioned, without compromising the security and operations of existing facilities. At the same time, managers developed better operational systems, addressed a range of weaknesses and managed a rapidly turning-over population of men (300 to 400 in or out movements each week and an average length of stay of two to three months).
- 4.9 A growing issue has been maintaining good standards, once achieved. For instance, some facilities are showing signs of wear and tear and backlogs in routine maintenance have built up. Staff do not always wear clear personal identification and meticulous adherence to proper security practices has occasionally lapsed. Managers recognise the importance of keeping standards high. They worked with commitment and energy to do so throughout the year but with only partial success.
- 4.10 There have been three major contract changes over which the prison's Director has had little control. The education and skills provider and the healthcare provider both changed early in 2015 to The Manchester College and Oxleas NHS Trust respectively. The national system for Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to take over responsibilities related to resettlement, within prisons and through the gate, started to operate in April 2015. MTC Novo holds the contract for HMP Thameside.
- 4.11 In every case, the changeover in provision from one contractor to another has involved a hiatus in the quality of provision to prisoners. The IMB wishes all the new providers well and recognises that the fall in the quality of services may be short term. It has nevertheless been unfair on those men caught up in the transition period. There have been knock-on effects too, with prison staff using time to help new providers, taking them away from other priorities.
- 4.12 In our 2013/14 report we raised 23 points of concern. Whilst some have been successfully addressed or have simply gone away, others remain. In summary:
- The range of purposeful activities and relevant work opportunities is still too small for the number of prisoners, including those over the age of 50. Remand prisoners who decline the opportunity to work are not encouraged to change their attitude. Supervisors of work do not always demand high standards.
  - There are still insufficient opportunities to study for vocational qualifications and access to the Virtual Campus was still not available on 30 June 2015.
  - The personal officer system is still unreliable and does not foster prisoners' confidence that their treatment will be fair. Officers are not proactive in encouraging prisoners to consider and to attend relevant courses. This damages a prisoner's chances of successful rehabilitation on his release.
  - Health promotion is underdeveloped and efforts to reduce tobacco addiction are still weak. Men with mental health problems that the prison cannot treat are held for too long because transfers to an appropriate facility are still slow.
  - The level of assaults is still too high (though most assaults are quickly stopped). Too many adjudications are adjourned because officer witnesses are unavailable to give evidence or do not attend.
  - There are still disgraceful delays in organising inquests.
  - Too much property is still mislaid or lost, especially during prisoner transfers. Sometimes IMB members are able to help find it, which means that prison staff could have done so if they had pursued it more doggedly.

## Concerns

- 4.13 The IMB's monitoring during 2014/15 has confirmed that HMP Thameside is a good prison. It could nevertheless be better. The IMB acknowledges the unequivocal aspiration of staff at HMP Thameside to continue to improve. They work hard.
- 4.14 The three concerns highlighted here can be seen as generic causes of the more specific concerns that have persisted since the 2013/14 report (see above) or have been highlighted in Section 5 of this report (see below). Addressing them requires action from, and collaboration between, the Director of the prison, the commissioners of services in NOMS (National Offender Management Service) and elsewhere (e.g. NHS England, the Skills Funding Agency), and those who decide policy in the Ministry of Justice and elsewhere in government, ultimately the Minister.
- 4.15 **Every delay risks damaging prisoners and their preparation for release.** When there is a lack of urgency in resolving difficulties, prisoners suffer. Many of the concerns we listed in our 2013/14 report were recognised as legitimate and could have been addressed by now, but they have not. A clear illustration of this was the continuing delay in commissioning the Virtual Campus.
- 4.16 Another illustration, which applies to prisons generally, is the delay in designing and implementing a system for managing prisoner property competently. The inadequacy of present arrangements has been highlighted by many IMBs (and the Ombudsman too). Quite apart from the impact on prisoners, many prisons spend large amounts of staff time trying to resolve property issues. The business case for investment in establishing better practices appears to be a strong one.
- 4.17 **Every hiatus risks damaging prisoners and their preparation for release.** When changes are implemented, the full commissioning of the new arrangements is too often incomplete at the point of changeover, so that there is a dip in performance and delivery. This is poor practice, whatever the reasons. Over the reporting year it applied to changes in contractors delivering core services (e.g. healthcare) and to the implementation of a new way of working (e.g. the start of provision of resettlement services by a CRC). It also applied to the commissioning of the new activity centre.
- 4.18 **Every failure to get a response right first time risks damaging prisoners and their preparation for release.** Every week during the reporting year, the IMB received Applications from prisoners in which they stated that they had tried to resolve some issue (from finding lost property to confirming their release date) with prison staff, but without success.
- 4.19 Board members recognise that there are often two sides to such stories. Nevertheless, a common situation is that the prisoner has asked an officer a question which, understandably, the officer concerned is unable to answer. Sometimes they have responded 'I don't know but I'll find out and get back to you' but have never reverted as promised. Sometimes they have said 'I don't know, ask someone who does'. Neither response takes the prisoner forward and both tend to confirm a prisoner in the view that the system is designed to be unhelpful.

## Section 5

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### REPORT ON 2014/15

#### Fairness

##### *Equality and inclusion*

###### *Overview*

- 5.1 Prisoners occasionally tell the IMB that they feel subjected to discrimination by staff but, on investigation, this is often not substantiated. Prison management has zero tolerance of discriminatory behaviour by staff and protected characteristics are respected. The prison's management of diversity has continued to improve.
- 5.2 The prison successfully integrates men who are potentially vulnerable, for a range of reasons, safely within the general prisoner population, enabling them to experience the same regime as all other prisoners.
- 5.3 Foreign national prisoners are managed well and there is good collaboration with Border Force officers to expedite deportation at end of sentence when this is required.

###### *Concerns*

- Although the prison has good provision for prisoners with physical disabilities, the range of activities suitable for older men, particularly those beyond retirement age, is too limited.
- Discriminatory or abusive attitudes, behaviour and language by prisoners, usually based on gender, sexual orientation or race, are not always robustly challenged by staff when they are displayed.

##### *Segregation/care and separation*

###### *Overview*

- 5.4 The prison's Care and Separation Unit has 20 cells most of which are usually occupied. The Unit is run well but the regime is a restricted one. HMIP reported that 'routines were limited' at the inspection in September 2014. This remains the case.
- 5.5 Few men are kept in the Unit for periods in excess of one month and most for considerably less. The prison does not segregate prisoners any longer than necessary. The few long stayers are invariably those who consistently resist strenuous attempts to relocate them on a wing. They prefer to stay in the Unit.

###### *Concerns*

- The quality of supporting paperwork has improved since the IMB reported last year, but too many adjudications still have to be adjourned because of the non-attendance of officers required to provide evidence.
- Sometimes adjudications are decided on the basis of CCTV evidence in the absence of a reporting officer. IMB members recognise that such decisions can be objectively fair, but they may not seem so to the man concerned and perceptions of unfairness, even if mistaken, are damaging.
- Sometimes men with mental illnesses or with open ACCT (Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork) documents are held in the Unit, which is undesirable.

#### Humanity

##### *Healthcare and mental health*

###### *Overview*

- 5.6 Healthcare provision showed general improvements during the first part of the reporting year and the number of Applications to the IMB related to healthcare fell.

- 5.7 The change in provider in April 2015 destabilised the situation, staff morale dipped and prisoner Applications spiked. Improvements were apparent by the end of the year but it is too soon to be confident that the new arrangements (including those for some contracted services like IDTS (Integrated Drug Treatment System)) will be of good quality. The jury is out.
- 5.8 The provision of information to the IMB (e.g. data about healthcare and healthcare complaints) has so far been poor.
- 5.9 Healthcare is one of the areas where the IMB's concerns about poor communication are important. Collaboration between healthcare and custody staff in the in-patient facility is good but the proper treatment of men, with medical conditions or requiring medication or needing external hospital appointments, who are accommodated on the wings requires excellent communication which is not presently guaranteed. As a consequence, appointments (internal and external) are sometimes missed, special diets and medical equipment may not be provided and prisoners become confused and worried because they lose confidence that they are being correctly treated.
- 5.10 The team providing support for prisoners with substance misuse problems, led by Serco's partner, Turning Point, is an effective one, receiving high accolades from HMIP. They run a number of groups for prisoners and have two 'dual diagnosis' workers (full and part time), who support prisoners with mental health as well as substance misuse issues. They are innovative and respond to new trends, for instance by delivering workshops on 'legal highs' and (for Sports Academy staff) steroid use.

#### *Concerns*

- Men who are seriously mentally ill should not be held in a prison. They are a risk to themselves and to others, as was tragically demonstrated by a prisoner from HMP Thameside shortly after the end of the reporting year. Even one such individual would be too many and there are always considerably more than this in HMP Thameside.
- A pioneering 'through the gate' scheme, in conjunction with London Borough of Newham, ensuring continuity of care for released prisoners with substance abuse problems, has been terminated, because of the introduction of CRCs. The IMB is not assured that it will be properly replaced.

#### **Safer custody**

##### *Overview*

- 5.11 Surveys of prisoner views by HMIP and MQPL (Monitoring the Quality of Prison Life) suggest that men generally feel safer in HMP Thameside than in most similar local prisons, despite the fact that the frequency of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults is too high.
- 5.12 The prison's safer custody and violence reduction units are effective. ACCT documents are opened when appropriate and procedures are followed carefully. There is a clear violence reduction strategy and prisoner violence reduction representatives perform a useful de-escalating function in some instances. There is a proper level of monitoring oversight by senior managers.
- 5.13 The prison's work to manage gang members and their potential antagonisms has been particularly praiseworthy and resulted in a Butler Trust Commendation.
- 5.14 Officers use restraint or force on prisoners only when there is no alternative. Sometimes they are necessary in order to put a reluctant individual onto a van to take them to court or another prison. Use-of-force statistics are monitored regularly and carefully to identify any significant trends.
- 5.15 There were no self-inflicted deaths in custody during the reporting year.

### *Concerns*

- The use of 'legal highs' by prisoners creates serious dangers and the prison's efforts to combat their use and educate prisoners about the risks they pose, energetic though they are, may not be sufficient to maintain prisoner safety. When prisoners go to hospital, having overdosed, they are accompanied by officers, tying up resources.
- The expected introduction of a no smoking policy within the prison has potential health benefits but many men will find it extremely difficult. It will create risks of increased agitation and violence if the range of possible consequences of the policy are not identified in advance and it will create a serious management challenge for staff.

## **Preparation for release**

### ***Education, learning and skills***

#### *Overview*

- 5.16 Education provision at HMP Thameside trod water during much of the reporting year, partly because of the withdrawal of A4E as the provider and their eventual replacement by The Manchester College early in 2015. Some worthwhile courses are offered both under and in addition to the OLASS (Offender Learning and Skills Service) contract.
- 5.17 The library continues to have a vibrant atmosphere, promotes literacy and reading, and is popular with many prisoners.

#### *Concern*

- The focus on preparation for release through education programmes was not sharp enough throughout the reporting year.
- Attendance rates for education courses are sometimes disappointing.

### ***Purposeful activity***

- 5.18 The system for allocating jobs improved during the reporting year so that they are better shared out. Nevertheless, there are not sufficient opportunities for good quality purposeful activity for the number of men held in HMP Thameside.
- 5.19 The newly-built activity centre opened in April. It has the potential to provide a range of good activities but, by the end of June, the available facilities were little more than a larger laundry and a larger bag-and-tag space. There were insufficient opportunities for the growing number of Category C prisoners approaching the ends of their sentences, to their frustration.

#### *Concerns*

- The net deficit in the availability of sufficient good quality purposeful activity for all the prisoners who require it, even when the new activity centre is fully operational, is a major issue for the prison.
- The space in the new activity centre was not commissioned quickly enough for the early groups of pre-release Category C prisoners to benefit.

### ***Resettlement***

#### *Overview*

- 5.20 The reporting year has seen the start of an intended revolution in the delivery of resettlement services for prisoners approaching their release. Prior to April, when the new arrangements started to operate, good work was being done by Serco's partner, Catch 22, in ensuring that many prisoners had accommodation arranged prior to their release and that there were employment or education opportunities open to them.

MTC Novo, the contracted CRC, was unable to pick up all this work immediately, creating hiatus.

- 5.21 A strength of the prison's provision is the way that prisoners who want to keep in touch with their families are helped to do so (as reported last year). This enhances the prospects for successful resettlement. The good work with families has continued and has been recognised in a Butler Trust Commendation.

#### *Concern*

- The arrangements for working through a CRC were not properly up to speed at the end of the reporting year and further delays will continue to compromise the prospects for men approaching their release.

### **Residential services**

#### *Overview*

- 5.22 Accommodation for prisoners at HMP Thameside is modern and of appropriate quality. The 600 cells in Houseblock 1 were not originally planned as double cells but, equipped with two bunks, they offer acceptable accommodation for two men. The double cells in Houseblock 2 have been designed as such and do not require bunks.
- 5.23 In-cell telephony and IT increase the efficiency with which the prison operates and enable prisoners to take direct responsibility for important aspects of their lives (like booking medical appointments or visits). The IT system has been significantly enhanced during the reporting year by including the most common foreign languages.
- 5.24 Food is generally good and options for a range of diets are provided. The particular requirements of Muslim prisoners during Ramadan are met well and major festivals are recognised in the menus provided.
- 5.25 Provision for physical activity using the facilities of the Sports Academy is appropriate, and additional equipment has been obtained, funded by the prisoners themselves (through the surpluses generated from canteen purchases and payment for telephone calls).
- 5.26 The regime generally operates smoothly, with movement of prisoners between activities monitored to minimise the opportunities for prisoners with known antagonisms (e.g. different gang affiliations) to cross paths. Association time is not generous but it is adequate, with those who are elderly or have achieved enhanced IEP (incentive and earned privileges) status entitled to spend greater time out of cell.

#### *Concerns*

- The quality of communication between prisoners and officers about day-to-day matters of proper concern to prisoners is variable. In part this is because of the relatively high proportion of officers who are inexperienced; some officers do not feel they have sufficient time to develop good quality communication with prisoners. When such time is not found, prisoners suffer.
- The quality of supervision of the work of prisoner orderlies is variable and sometimes wings and serveries are not as clean as they should be.
- The routine maintenance of furniture and equipment on wings and in cells sometimes appears to be casual, either because problems are not reported promptly or because there are delays in making necessary repairs.

## Section 6

### WORK OF THE IMB

6.1 On 1 July 2014 the IMB had 10 members, including three dual boarders. During the reporting year two members resigned (one a dual boarder) and five new members were recruited so that on 30 June 2015 there were 13 members. The prison was visited by at least two members every week. The Board met every calendar month, with the Director or one of his senior colleagues in attendance for part of every meeting. The Board has been ably supported throughout the year by its clerk.

#### *IMB Application statistics*

Code	Subject	2012/13 (%)	2013/14 (%)	2014/15 (%)	Rank
A	Accommodation	4 (1)	9 (2)	13 (4)	
B	Adjudications	7 (1)	3 (1)	1 (0)	
C	Equality & Diversity (inc. religion)	6 (1)	4 (1)	4 (1)	
D	Education/employment/training inc. IEP	13 (3)	24 (6)	31 (8)	6
E 1	Family/visits inc. mail & phone	60 (13)	29 (8)	27 (7)	7
E 2	Finance/pay	31 (6)	13 (3)	17 (5)	
F	Food/kitchen related	5 (1)	3 (1)	9 (2)	
G	Health related	109 (22)	53 (14)	67 (18)	1
H 1	Property (within current establishment)	43 (9)	60 (16)	54 (15)	2
H 2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	38 (8)	26 (7)	47 (13)	4
H 3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	33 (7)	11 (3)	3 (1)	
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	33 (7)	46 (12)	32 (9)	5
J	Staff/prisoner concerns inc. bullying	68 (14)	66 (17)	53 (15)	3
K	Transfers	15 (3)	12 (3)	0 (0)	
L	Miscellaneous	13 (3)	20 (5)	14 (4)	
	<b>Total number of IMB applications</b>	478	357	372	
	Of total: number of IMB Confidential Access was:	5	10	3	