



**Independent Monitoring Board**

**HMP & YOI Thorn Cross**

**Annual Report  
May 2014 – April 2015**

## 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.9
	Education, Learning and Skills	p.9
	Healthcare and Mental Health	p.11
	Purposeful Activity	p.11
	Resettlement	p.12
	Safer custody	p.12
	Care and Separation	p.13
	Residential Services	p.13
Section 6	Other areas of the prison regime	p.15
Section 7	The work of the Independent Monitoring Board	p.17

## Section 3

---

### 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 351 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 but due to the decrease in numbers of prisoners aged under 25, this upper age limit was removed in 2013. 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, with shared cells. The cessation of the High Intensity training (HIT) operations based on Unit 5 has led to closure of their separate education and training facilities. This is currently being converted into additional living accommodation, in spacious shared cells, with the objective (in April 2015) of establishing this as a rehabilitation unit for prisoners during the last three months of their sentence.
- 3.1.3 There are a variety of workshops and the education department provides general education, art, computer skills, life skills and a number 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 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 are operating workshops on site for suitable prisoners and negotiations are underway with other companies to provide on site work placements.
- 3.1.4 The gym and weights room and the playing fields offer a wide variety of activities.
- 3.1.5 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 GEOAmev with an increasing proportion through the use of the prison's own vehicles.

## Section 4

---

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 4.1.1 2014-2015 has been another year of consolidation rather than major change for Thorn Cross and the prison is much more settled. The removal of the upper age limit at Thorn Cross has led to a much wider population distribution, with significant numbers in the over 50 age range. This has required a response across all levels from residences to workshops and education, and on the whole, these challenges have been met. The more mature prisoners and the effective Peer Mentoring systems that have been developed have led to more stable regimes and a better informed prison population. The governors and staff at Thorn Cross continue to provide a fair and decent environment for prisoners within a positive and purposeful culture, and are to be congratulated on their enthusiasm and dedication to the welfare of the prisoners and the rehabilitation process.
- 4.1.2 There have been a number of assaults by prisoners on Officers, one of which led to the officer spending time in hospital. These were unexpected and in at least one case were thought to be a result of prisoners having taken NPS (New Psychoactive Substances) while on town visits. NPS are a major problem and while steps are being taken to adopt best practice in detection and advice against use, staff are having to be much more aware of the possibility of unpredictable behaviour and take appropriate precautions for their own safety, and that of the Prison.
- 4.1.3 A “near miss” was recorded when a prisoner attempted suicide following an incident. Fortunately the ligature attachment point collapsed and no major harm occurred, but this was the first of its type at Thorn Cross. There was a full investigation and a number of learning points identified, particularly around prisoner observation, which have been implemented. A second incident, when a prisoner suffered a cardiac arrest in the gym was expertly dealt with by the prison and health care staff and a full recovery is expected. The prison is to be congratulated on their response to these incidents.
- 4.1.4 Incidents where prisoners complain of being “treated like kids” – a hangover from the YOI days are fortunately becoming rarer, but still occur. However prisoners complain that they are not being given the full freedom they expected at a category D prison, and compare Thorn Cross unfavourably with other prisons, particularly Kirkham. These comments are largely unfounded, but the issues of inconsistency of approach between prisons, and historical ways of doing things need to be reviewed and anomalies ironed out. Communication links between prisoners and staff are generally good, with Peer Mentors playing a very active role in highlighting issues and communicating them to Governors and vice-versa, through various forums, which IMB members regularly attend. Bringing Offender Managers onto the Units is a positive step towards improved communications particularly related to ROTL.
- 4.1.5 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. Now however, the one unit reserved for YOs has been opened to all ages, and this expertise may will be lost entirely as a result of the “more flexible” staffing arrangements.
- 4.1.6 The changes in the age profile at the prison and the introduction of Offender Learning and Skills Service 4 (OLASS 4) has led to positive progress within the prison regimes, particularly where the areas of education and training. Despite the requirement that issues of basic learning and numerical skills should have been addressed at establishments prior to Thorn Cross, a significant number of prisoners

do not have these skills, and real efforts are being made to ensure that all prisoners can achieve Level 1 Reading and Numeracy before they leave.

- 4.1.7 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. The Prison has a policy that all prisoners who are eligible, including Lifers and IPP prisoners are treated equally in the areas of sentence planning activities, ROTL and workouts etc. Almost half 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, and the system has been tightened up. This has led to more stringent requirements for ROTL, and audits of those on ROTL and work outs have led to reduced opportunities for all. 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, and overall, the process seems to be improving.
- 4.1.8 The requirements of Fair and Sustainable and Benchmarking have largely been met and the staff operating regimes are now generally accepted. However, the reduced staffing levels on the units and elsewhere lead to concerns from the staff, particularly during the night period, when only one officer may be on duty. There is a perceived risk in confronting misbehaviour, and staff need to be reassured that backup is immediately available in such situations. There are occasions when staff sickness, the need for escort duties, or other incidents have led to the operating regimes being curtailed, for instance CVS work, there are complaints that the resettlement and sentence planning activities are being affected. The Board is endeavouring to monitor these occasions carefully.
- 4.1.9 Thorn Cross is about to celebrate its 30yrs as an Open Prison, and while the buildings and grounds are maintained as well as resources permit, the age of some facilities is showing. Fortunately, the vandalism associated with the YOI regimes has largely disappeared, but problems with blocked drains and locks on toilet doors persist. Much of the refurbishing of Unit 7 has been done by the site Works department, to a very high standard and low cost, and this unit is being commissioned as additional accommodation in shared cells. Issues of sharing have provoked a strong reaction from prisoners who are generally used to single accommodation, and the arrangements for this last period of their sentence need to be considered carefully.
- 4.1.10 The kitchens have risen to the challenge of increased numbers and the revised menu arrangements are accepted, with a move by the mature prisoners to eat their main meals in their cells rather than communally. Greater consultation with prisoners on menus and a more stable arrangements for kitchen helpers has made a significant contribution to the improvements observed and generated favourable comments from the Prisoners.
- 4.1.11 There were no formal or unannounced prison inspections during the reporting period.

#### 4.1.12 The main concerns are as follows

##### For the attention of the Governor

- The Board is very pleased with the improvements made in shortening the lines of communication between the OMU/offender supervisors and the prisoners. This process needs to continue as a high priority.. (ref section 5.5.1, 6.1.2)
- The introduction of new working regimes for prison staff as a consequence of Benchmarking and Fair and Sustainable, and more frequent movements of Staff within the Prison has led to reduced opportunities for communication between prisoners and staff. Staff need to be encouraged to take more time to talk with Prisoners and understand their needs (ref sections 6.1.1).
- There is still too much variation of “custom and practice” between Units in terms of minor rules and facilities, and steps should be taken to ensure that the best standards are established throughout, with the elimination of unnecessary restrictions and provision of a uniform standard of equipment etc across the Prison. (ref section 5.8.5)
- The loss of Unit 1 as a dedicated YOI wing will inevitably lead to loss of expertise in handling these Prisoners. While Units operating across the whole age range gives many advantages, consideration needs to be given to the particular issues related to the older and younger prisoners, Lifers, IPPs and vulnerable groups whose needs require more specialised skills. This may justify dedicated residential areas for some categories of prisoners and special training for the staff involved.(ref section 5.8.8)
- The transfer of Site Support and maintenance services to Amey at the end of the year seems likely to lead to less local control and ability to manage work and budgets. The consequences of this on the operating regimes need to be monitored thoroughly during the coming year. (ref section 5.8.9)
- The use of Unit 7 as a final resettlement unit for Prisoners during their last three months at the Prison is causing considerable controversy, mainly as a consequence of having to share cells. Consideration needs to be given to the management of this very important phase of resettlement and an optimum use of Unit 7 developed. (ref section 5.8.7)

##### For the attention of the prison service

- The use of New Psychoactive Substances is a major concern and this is believed to have led to a number of serious incidents and assaults on Staff at Thorn Cross and elsewhere. Urgent measures need to be taken across the Prison Service to ensure that detection methods are improved and education and other programmes are introduced to minimise the use of these materials both within and outside the Prison Community. (ref section 6.2.3)
- While the levels of staffing have been assessed as being adequate for a stable regime, high levels of long term sickness, minor and major incidents eg assaults, unplanned hospital escort duties etc and the more rigorous ROTL policies have led to prisoners activities being restricted. There are concerns that sentence planning requirements are being delayed and periods of lockdown increased as a result of non availability of staff. (ref sections 5.3.6, 5.5.1)
- 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, to compensate for the failure to deliver in this area at other establishments. (ref section 5.2.3)

- Prisoners who have adjudications opened at Thorn Cross immediately prior to being transferred to closed conditions will normally have these, and any appropriate punishments/IEP reviews, completed at the receiving establishment. While this is believed to be the situation in most cases, if the case is complex, or involves the police, this may not always be the case and an audit of these processes would be beneficial. (ref section 5.7.2)
- The Sycamore Tree restorative Justice course is seen as an key part of the overall rehabilitation programme at the prison and the Board would like to see the Prison Service providing more funding for this programme. (ref section 6.3.1)
- While not strictly within the remit of the IMB, the continual failures and poor performance of the Prison Intranet Service continues to hamper the work of the Board and is a major source of frustration and loss of productivity within the Prison service. This is in spite of recent upgrades to the system. (ref section 7.5.2)

#### Update on previous year's concerns

- The Board is very pleased with the progress made by the Governors and Staff at Thorn Cross in addressing many of the issues raised in the previous year, in particular in trying to improve Staff/Prisoner communications and addressing many of the ROTL issues. However little progress appears to have been made in addressing the Prison Service issues and the levels of staffing and their effects on the operating regimes continues to give concerns, particularly with the increasing prevalence of NSP
- 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, while in theory being engaged in productive activity spending a lot of time doing little or nothing.
- It is disappointing that the unit previously dedicated to YO's has now been opened to all ages, and the recommendation by the Board that the experience of the staff in dealing with these younger prisoners, which was an asset to the Prison Service and should be retained, has been ignored.

## Section 5

---

### 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 single staff member specifically dedicated to these activities and although staff have time allocated, in reality it means that input depends heavily on other demands on their time. However, some members of staff make an outstanding contribution and this has been recognised in an award nomination. Meetings are chaired at a senior level, and outcomes combined into a plan which is reviewed on a regular basis.
- 5.1.2 Many of the social identities at Thorn Cross have low numbers, so the Hub data provided is often based on a low population and a single event can cause a change from Green to Red. As such, the statistics presented need to be viewed with caution, but there is nothing that suggests that any ethnic or other group receives adverse treatment in any way. Indeed, Thorn Cross makes special efforts to cater for all Diversities and a great deal of time and effort is taken to deal with specific needs of individuals.
- 5.1.3 With the increasing age range it has been apparent that the older groups (50+) do have different needs and a 50+ group has been set up to address these, with informal meetings and feedback from their representatives. There have been concerns that older prisoners have felt vulnerable and insecure and these need to be followed up. Gym and other activities are being tailored to meet the needs of the less active prisoners and prisoners with physical (visually impaired, wheelchair bound, etc) are very well supported by other prisoners.
- 5.1.4 Discrimination Incident Report Forms (DIRFs) have been revised and the new systems are now better understood. Maybe as a result there have been a doubling of those submitted in the last year, and all these are fully investigated. Although a number are received against the staff, none of these have been proven. Those against prisoners are often substantiated, although it seems rare for any action other than a warning to be given. However, the system has been audited and appears to be satisfactory.
- 5.1.5 Prisoner representatives regularly 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 Thorn Cross has a wide cross section of Faiths and needs are met as far as is practicable through the Chaplaincy team, the Kitchens, the Canteen lists and facilities. Many of the diverse groups have representatives who participate in the DEAT discussions
- 5.1.7 While Diversity is seen as an essential area for the Prison to record its compliance, the limited time available for these activities could mean that issues are treated in a superficial manner. While there is no evidence for this at the present time, the Board feels that it is important that Diversity issues remain a high priority and time, including that for training of staff, is allocated appropriately.

## 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 led to greater 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. Staff redeployment and cutbacks have now been completed and the area stabilised, with positive moves by all to maintain the high standards achieved previously. There is also an 'outreach' programme which brings functional skills to the work and training environment so that prisoners can learn these whilst also working and training in other areas. This has shown significant benefits.
- 5.2.2 Thorn Cross continues to offer a wide range of classes and workshops which have developed in positive ways over the past year. The workshops providing skills training for the building trade now offer more modern techniques such as dry-lining which will more effectively equip prisoners for employment on release. Farms and Gardens is being extended with new raised beds and expanded poly tunnels in preparation for opening a shop which will sell products produced in the gardens and workshops. The building of these expanded facilities is being done by the bricklaying workshop which in turn offers new opportunities to prisoners.
- 5.2.3 Although there is an assumption by the prison service that prisoners coming to Thorn Cross will have reached adequate levels of literacy and numeracy in their previous establishments, this is often not the case. In order to overcome the reluctance of prisoners to leave other activities for literacy and numeracy classes the education staff have started to run outreach classrooms in the Farms and Gardens area. This innovation has seen a significant increase in the numbers attending classes in basic skills. The art class continues to produce some very impressive work by prisoners and has also expanded into renovating furniture which is sold in a local Sue Ryder shop. Once Thorn Cross's own shop is open, this will be on sale there. IT classes are well attended. The library provides a quiet, stress-free environment and the number of books borrowed has increased significantly since the age range widened.
- 5.2.4 Although there has been a concerted and largely successful effort made by officers and staff to ensure that all prisoners are engaged in meaningful activity during the working day, there are still occasions when prisoners have to leave classes for other appointments or activities. Whilst logistically this will sometimes be necessary, all care must be taken to ensure that education and training remains a priority for prisoners. The Board has concerns that the "work ethic" is seriously lacking with some prisoners and there are frequently occasions where many prisoners are seen away from their normal activity areas with little sign of supervision. On the other hand, there are excellent examples of prisoners doing fantastic work and passing on valuable skills they have learned previously to other inmates.
- 5.2.5 Prisoners have been able to do the CSCS test, which is essential for obtaining work in the building sector, thanks to a mobile vehicle supported by Carillion. However there seem to be a number of outstanding administration and security issues which have delayed its use and effectiveness.
- 5.2.6 The Virtual Campus, which provides an important capability within education and training has been commissioned. The full time Learning support practitioner has been developing programmes which will be beneficial and appeal to the prison population as a whole. Prisoners are now able to complete a wide range of courses including

health and safety and driving test theory in this way as well as various induction courses.

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

- 5.3.1 Healthcare have continued to have a challenging year providing a service for all age groups including the young offenders. The staff now hold chronic disease management clinics for diabetes, hypertension and cardiac patients. As well as this they hold “running clinics”, Over 50’s, Weight Management and health checks for the fit and well.
- 5.3.2 There are optician clinics every 5 weeks and a local optometrist deals with the diabetic retinopathy screening as there are currently 10 diabetics within the establishment and it is anticipated that this figure may increase with the older prisoner population. The clinic deals with the newly diagnosed and the diabetics who have not had an opportunity to avail themselves of the service previously.
- 5.3.3 The dental service is now well established following the reappointment of a dentist. There is also an in house physiotherapy service that assess patients and refers to the gym for exercise programmes or to other health professionals to manage the treatment. The gym currently operates three sessions per week but may need to increase because of the number of referrals. A drop in health advisory service is very successful and is consulted on a wide range of topics.
- 5.3.4 The healthcare team performed admirably when a prisoner suffered a cardiac arrest whilst in the gym. The prisoner is now making a good recovery.
- 5.3.5 Nurse staffing has remained stable but the prison is currently recruiting for another nurse and more administration support. The Advanced Nurse Practitioner from HMP Risley also holds a weekly clinic at Thorn Cross. The support from the General Practitioners is sufficient but could be more effective if some of the administration work could be delegated. Mental Health services provide one clinic per week but have increasing client numbers. There is also the service of a visiting psychiatrist when there are sufficient numbers to hold a clinic session for an efficient and effective service.
- 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, and a repeat prescriptions service for those on long term medication is undergoing a trial. More frequent hospital visits, and occasions where staff are required to escort and remain with prisoners while they are in hospital can play havoc with staffing arrangements and can have knock on consequences for the regimes within the prison.

### **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, including Lifers and those with IPP sentences to follow a path of town visits, home visits, CVS placements in the community and work placements. The revisions of the ROTL policy and more rigorous checks on prisoners on workouts have led to more limited activities, but these issues are gradually being resolved and the number of prisoners on workouts is increasing again. The programme of resettlement is phased over the length of sentence remaining and this can cause apparent discrepancies and dissatisfaction among prisoners who see someone apparently getting preferential treatment, when in reality, they have more of the programme to accomplish in a shorter time prior to release. However, the numbers of CVS and work placements and the supervision required for these is limited, and efforts are being made to reduce bottlenecks and increase the opportunities for productive work within the prison itself
- 5.5.2 Thorn Cross has developed a number of successful partnerships with organisations concerned with housing and employment, and has embraced the new Communities Resettlement Companies approach with Shelter being a key partner, and the outcomes from this approach continue to be very encouraging.
- 5.5.3 Thorn Cross is located within a residential area and adjacent to a primary school. After some earlier concerns around rerolling the prison to cover all age groups, links with the local community have improved, and the Prison is making efforts to ensure that there is community involvement and understanding of any proposed changes. The proposed farm shop should also help to establish links with the community..

## **5.6 Safer Custody**

- 5.6.1 The experience of the IMB is that most prisoners feel safe in Thorn Cross and there is little evidence of violence, bullying or intimidation. If this is observed it is dealt with quickly. However, there are occasional concerns raised by older prisoners who feel vulnerable and care has to be taken that historical associations and relationships are not allowed to revive.
- 5.6.2 Restorative justice through the Sycamore Tree projects continues to be a success at Thorn Cross, with 4 courses having been run in the last year. The funding for these does not appear to come from Prison Budgets, and while sterling work is done by the Chaplaincy team in raising the funds externally, it seems inappropriate that such a valuable resettlement and rehabilitation activity is not fully supported by the Prison Service.
- 5.6.3 There are some concerns, highlighted by comments made and 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.
- 5.6.4 The number of Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork (ACCT) designations is low and excellent support is offered to vulnerable prisoners. However, a "near miss" was recorded when a prisoner attempted suicide following an incident, when an ACCT was not open at the time. Fortunately the ligature attachment point collapsed and no major harm occurred, but this was the first of its type at Thorn Cross. There was a full investigation and a number of learning points identified, particularly around prisoner

observation, which have been implemented.

- 5.6.5 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. 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. This has continued to work well, but as the prison capacity has increased and Unit 7 has become available the C&S unit has been closed on occasion to release manpower for other purposes. The shared cells, which have non screened facilities, do not seem to present problems, and are restricted to single occupancy whenever possible. The 4 segregation cells are still used on rare occasions if a violent or difficult prisoner is awaiting shipment.
- 5.7.2 Adjudications take place in a designated room 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. However Thorn Cross has a very low tolerance policy and prisoners who are adjudicated for significant offences are usually returned to closed conditions. The result of this is that while adjudications may be opened they are not completed at Thorn Cross and the onus is on the receiving prison to complete these and see that appropriate punishments are awarded, and if appropriate, IEP reviews are carried out in accordance with the IEP process. If the processes are complex, involve witnesses or Police involvement, there is a view that these processes are not always completed at the receiving prison, and apart from the return to closed conditions, the offence committed at Thorn Cross may sometimes go unpunished. Enquiries to Boards elsewhere (eg Risley) suggest that this is rare, but a formal audit of the process may be appropriate.

## **5.8 Residential Services**

- 5.8.1 The residential units are generally clean and well-maintained, but now the buildings are 30years old, this is a continuous struggle.. Vandalism has decreased with the influx of older prisoners and the Works department is able to keep on top of any maintenance issues, although some units are more badly affected than others and drains blockages are an ongoing concern.
- 5.8.2 A seemingly minor issue of being able to secure toilet and shower cubicle doors to give an adequate level of privacy and decency is one which has caused considerable debate across the prison, and there is inconsistency across the units which needs to be addressed.
- 5.8.3 Complaints received by the IMB related to food have been low this year, with probably as many compliments as complaints. However, there is no room for complacency and with the increasing numbers and Units, the Kitchen staff, reinforced by a number of increasingly effective prisoners, are able to provide good meals, and these are observed regularly by the Board to be sufficient and of adequate quality. Problems exist with overlapping meal times with health care appointments, wash ups etc, and lack of meals for those working out or coming in late, but these should be

easily resolved. The Governors are expected to look at comment on the entries in the Food Comments book on a regular basis.

- 5.8.4 Food focus groups with the prisoners meet every two months to discuss menus and resolve issues. Issues related to special diets, religious festivals, eg Ramadan and and servery operations which are designed to separate Halal from non Halal foods are given special attention, and are usually effective.
- 5.8.5 The IMB has received 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. While this particular issue appears to have been simply resolved there are still anomalies over what prisoners can or cannot bring in, or do at Thorn Cross compared to other establishments, and sometimes, what is done in different Units at Thorn Cross, and this understandably causes confusion and resentment for affected prisoners.
- 5.8.6 The change in age range has resulted in Thorn Cross operating nearer to capacity and this is pleasing. Previously, one unit had been retained for Young Offenders and in its report last year, the IMB indicated that it would like to see this 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. However, reduced numbers of YOs has led to this unit being populated by prisoners of all ages, and some of the older and vulnerable prisoners have expressed concern and fears from being in very close proximity to this younger element.
- 5.8.7 The plans for Unit 7, which was the old educational Block for the HIT Unit 5 are still being developed, but currently the proposal is for it to be used as the pre-release unit for prisoners in the last three months of their sentence, and concentrate the resettlement services in that unit. As the cell have double occupancy, even though they are spacious and well appointed, there have been many concerns about sharing and the basis for allocating cell mates. These issues will need to be addressed if the reorganisation proposals are to be successful.
- 5.8.8 The merits of having different units for different categories of prisoners is a frequent topic for discussion. No smoking units, Units for YOs, Over 50s, Lifers and IPP prisoners may have their advantages in terms of mutual support, staff expertise and access to services, but this must be balanced against the benefits of a calming influence of older prisoners on the young and the avoidance of setting precedents and the avoidance of “gang cultures”.
- 5.8.9 Site Services at Thorn Cross are to be transferred to Amey at the beginning of June. This is leading to concerns around the flexibility that current arrangements have and although there not believed to be any reductions in manpower, the new arrangements do appear to impose a further layer of management and tight budgetary control and contractual implications. The Unit 7 conversion, for which a quote of c£500k was received, has been carried out to a very high standard by the current maintenance team, at a fraction of this cost, would be virtually impossible under the new arrangements, and the Board is concerned that projected benefits from the proposed new contracts may not materialise. The sense of pride of ownership of the prison by the maintenance team, which currently exists, and the ability to identify and fix problems quickly using local initiatives could be eroded, and the effectiveness of the planned changes need to be monitored by the Prison.

## 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. 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 and may not know the individual Prisoners.
- 6.1.2 A number of the OMU staff have now been moved to the Units so there can be more direct interaction with offender supervisors and others. It is too early to say how effective this approach will be, but the shortening of lines of communication can only be beneficial. Problems with Prisoners not being able to access their Offender Supervisors and Personal Officers, often as a result of shift patterns, continue to dominate Board Applications.
- 6.1.3 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 usually effective and constructive and prisoners feel listened to, even though they do not always get what they want. The approach adopted could possibly be improved, with a tighter agenda, more discussion of fewer topics, with better reporting on actions agreed and progress made.
- 6.1.4 The new IEP systems are now well established. Thorn Cross has no Entry level prisoners and very few Basic. Over 80% are on Enhanced and it can be difficult to find meaningful activities where positive contributions can be made by the prisoners to justify their Enhanced status. The Board has had almost no applications related to the IEP system or the reviews. However, there is a concern that prisoners whose Adjudications might well result in an IEP review are often shipped out and the paperwork associated with the adjudication and possible IEP review is not followed through at the receiving establishment, with the result that the appropriate punishments or IEP status change might not be enacted. This situation is made worse through the apparent inability of the prison Intranet system to track the details of prisoner reports and activity once they have left Thorn Cross (see section 5.7.2).

#### 6.2 Substance misuse

- 6.2.1 The department works collaboratively with other services such as CARATS and CRI. They have established good working relationships with healthcare staff at HMP Rlsley with nursing, IT for System One and Pharmacy.
- 6.2.2 The “Pathways” team continues to provide support for prisoners with drug related or other problems, with the one to one approach offering the best results. The use of Methadone treatment programmes has increased as the prisoner age range has increased, reflecting historical abuse, but the use of NPS is the major problem, largely displacing the softer drugs which are susceptible to detection in the mandatory drugs testing programme. MDT failures are now relatively rare.
- 6.2.3 The use of New Psychoactive Substances is a major concern and this is believed to have led to a number of serious incidents and assaults on Staff at Thorn Cross and elsewhere, with a member of staff ending up in hospital on one occasion. These drugs can apparently be obtained relatively easily and have been smuggled into the

Prison or taken whilst on ROTL and are very dangerous. Efforts are being made to discourage use through publicity and counselling. Urgent measures need to be taken across the Prison Service to ensure that detection methods are improved and education and other programmes are introduced to minimise the use of these materials both within and outside the Prison Community.

### 6.3 **Chaplaincy**

- 6.3.1 The Board would like to note the inspirational work of 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 and is a very positive contribution in the resettlement programme. The Sycamore Tree programme is an essential part of this, and the Chaplaincy team is particularly enterprising in obtaining sources of funding to enable this to continue – although the Board feels that these programmes should be resourced through the Prison Service. Chaplaincy have involvement with DEAT, Safer Custody and all aspects of Prison Life, and help to organise activities and concerts provided by outside groups.

### 6.4 **Gym**

- 6.4.1 The gym and weights room provide a focus for leisure and training activities, and provide accredited courses 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 are detailed for duties elsewhere through absence or illness among staff.

## 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	6
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	0
Number of members leaving within reporting period	3
Total number of Board meetings during reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	225
<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. One member retired at the end of 2014 through tenure and another retired as a result of increased commitments to the Magistracy. The Board attempted to recruit a further 4 members, and although 3 recommendations were made for approval, by the time security and other clearances were completed, all had withdrawn their applications.

The current BDO has had to resign following a career move, and a further Board member will be retiring through tenure at the end of 2015. Another recruitment campaign has been conducted, with the result that a further 4 applicants, (three of them ex members of IMBs) have been recommended for appointment.

The TPR was held in the Autumn of 2014. This review led to a number of recommendations, with more individual responsibilities for specific areas of monitoring.

The total number of visits to the prison at 225 is slightly less than in the previous year, and reflects in Part the reduced numbers of Board members. More effort was made to combine Rota visits with other activities at the prison.

## 7.2 Applications to the Board

### 7.2.1 Statistics

Code	Subject	2011-12	2012-13	2013- 14	2014-15
A	Accommodation	4	6	1	1
B	Adjudications	0	4	14	2
C	Equality & Diversity (inc religion)	1	2	2	2
D	Education/employment/training inc IEP	8	10	4	4
E 1	Family/visits inc mail & phone	3	2	0	2
E 2	Finance/pay	0	5	6	6
F	Food/kitchen related	2	8	3	1
G	Health related	2	5	5	4
H 1	Property (within current establishment)	4	5	1	2
H 2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	2	8	5	4
H 3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	0	1	1	0
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	18	24	32	32
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc bullying	31	13	7	4
K	Transfers	2	11	10	1
L	Miscellaneous	2	5	2	2

	<b>Total number of IMB applications</b>	79	109	90	67

- 7.2.2 The reducing number of applications over the last few years is encouraging, and it is hoped that this is not due to a loss of faith in the ability of the IMB to solve problems, but a genuine improvement in the activities at Thorn Cross, resulting from a more stable regime and the efforts of the prison staff to resolve issues before they reach the IMB stage. 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. Where this is the case, applications have been categorised under the core issue or classed as separate applications. The list includes both written applications and those which are picked up 'on the hoof' and written up by the IMB member in conjunction with the prisoner.
- 7.2.3 As reported earlier, the largest proportion (almost half) of applications are related to ROTL and in particular the apparent lack of communication between prisoners and staff regarding the likely outcome, leading to prisoner expectations which are unfulfilled. There are starting to be improvements in this area with offender supervisors based on units, but there is still some way to go. The new ROTL rules and stricter requirements have led to difficulties in arranging some activities outside the prison and prisoners can feel aggrieved that their sentence planning needs cannot be achieved because of restrictions on ROTLs, compounded by occasional unavailability of staff to supervise CSV activities etc outside the prison.
- 7.2.4 Dissatisfaction with treatment and punishments resulting from adjudications has significantly reduced over the last year, although this could be because prisoners who commit serious offences are quickly shipped to closed prisons, and may not have an opportunity to complain within the Thorn Cross system. Adjudications are attended from time to time by members of the IMB and punishments reviewed for consistency by the senior Governor, and we believe them to be conducted properly.
- 7.2.5 It is pleasing that the applications related to bullying issues continue to decrease, but the Board is aware of a number of instances where the same staff are named in different applications, and are reviewing these in confidence with the Governor. As mentioned earlier, the number of DIRFs completed have increased significantly over the last year, but this may be more a result of publicising the guidelines for these than a real increase in incidents.
- 7.2.6 The applications related to Equality & Diversity, Property, Accommodation, Visits and Canteen etc were at a very low level, and probably reflect the improved opportunities for prisoners to address these issues through various committees and mentoring arrangements.

### **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 issues. 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, Health care, 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 while older prisoners on longer sentences usually know about the IMB and its role, this is not always the case for Young Offenders. Efforts are being made to redress this issue through the use of leaflets, and visits to Unit 6 where new prisoners are housed initially. The excellent IMB video from Lancaster Farms cannot be shown as conventional CDs are not compatible with Prison systems, and alternative options are being sought.

### **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 Continuing development course and the Board Development Officer course and found these helpful. 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 and reorganisation.. The Team Performance Review in October 2014 helped to develop a plan to meet the new challenges being faced by the change in age range and has largely been implemented.
- 7.5.2 The use of CJSM for secure communications has been made easier by changes to the systems which provide for more storage capability and fewer instances of being “thrown off” although it is still felt that the system is far from satisfactory. The Prison Intranet system is exceedingly slow, taking a long period to start up and operate, although it was upgraded in the Autumn. As a result it is little used by the IMB, to the detriment of the Board’s interaction with prison issues and activities, as it just takes too long to access. This system is the subject of numerous complaints from the Prison Staff, and major efficiency benefits would be seen if Staff were able to access required information as quickly and effectively as would be the norm in industry or through the public internet.

## 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.