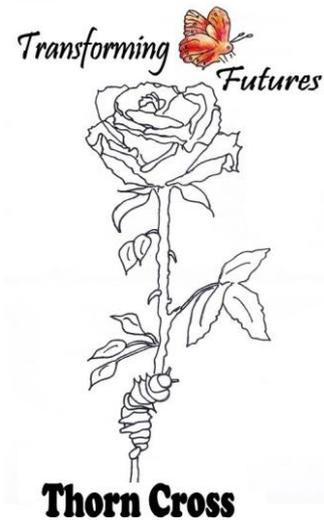




Independent Monitoring Board

HMP &YOI Thorn Cross

Annual Report May 2015 – April 2016



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

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Section 3

3 DESCRIPTION OF PRISON

- 3.1 HMP &YOI Thorn Cross is located in Appleton Thorn 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. 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. The prison now has a capacity for 381 in 7 units across the whole age range, and includes Lifers and those with IPP sentences. Prisoners who have been categorised as Cat D, who are suitable for open conditions and nearing the end of their sentence are accepted at Thorn Cross, with the objective of successful rehabilitation into the community.
- 3.2 In 2013 the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) closed and has been redeveloped to provide additional accommodation, with 9 shared cells, to be used for prisoners when they first arrive at Thorn Cross, The education building for the former High Intensity Training Unit has now been converted into additional living accommodation, in spacious shared cells. The intention (in April 2015) was to use this as a rehabilitation unit for prisoners during the last three months of their sentence. However, objections by prisoners to sharing cells at their end of their sentence has been strong, and the latest proposals, which seem to be well supported, are to introduce prisoners to Thorn Cross into Unit 6 with shared cells, move them onto Unit 7, also in shared cells for the initial period of sentence, and then into single cells as these become available. However, the high occupancy of the prison during the early part of 2016 has led to allocation on a “needs must” basis and often prisoners have to be allocated to wherever a bed becomes available
- 3.3 The Prison has no formal Segregation Unit, but 4 segregation cells still exist on Unit 6 and these are used occasionally if a prisoner has to be removed from a unit as a result of behavioural issues prior to being transferred to a closed institution.
- 3.4 The site has a number of on site work opportunities as well as training workshops. 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.
- 3.5 Workouts are a key part of this programme, through Community Service or work placements outside the prison. Changes in ROTL (Release on temporary License) and other policies have led to a reduction in external work opportunities, but these are now being re-established, and efforts are being made to increase the numbers of Prisoners carrying out productive work on site.
- 3.6 Training and education is provided by Manchester College, under the name of NOVUS. Healthcare is commissioned by NHS England and provided by Bridgewater Community Services and GMW Mental Health Partnership. Prisoners’ transport is provided by GEOAmey with an increasing proportion through the use of the prison’s own vehicles. Amey are contracted to provide for site maintenance activities. Resettlement services, including counselling for drug use, is provided by Pathways, who provide a comprehensive resettlement programme.
- 3.7 The gym and weights room are the focus of leisure activities, but the extensive playing fields are little used. The Farms and Gardens work continues to make Thorn Cross a very attractive site.

Section 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 4.1 2015-2016 has been a year of relatively stable operation, with the Prison now operating at or near full capacity. This has put increasing pressure on the provision of work placements and rehabilitation activities. Emphasis on resettlement and the wide age range of Prisoners has led to the need for changes which have required a response across all levels, from residences to workshops, workouts, education and ROTL. On the whole, these challenges have been met, and the Prison is justifiably proud of its achievements.
- 4.2 While the Government policy is directed towards the successful resettlement and rehabilitation of prisoners in the community, the resources to fulfil these obligations have been severely cut through budget restraints. This has led to reductions in provisions for education and training and a number of workshops and other activities have had to be reduced, with the aim of diverting resources to providing level 2 qualifications and adequate numeracy and literacy skills, which should have been completed at before arrival Thorn Cross. Issues which affect staff availability can lead to periods regime restrictions, and this can have a knock on effect on the resettlement programmes.
- 4.3 Despite these pressures, 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 as a whole.
- 4.4 The use of NPS (New Psychoactive Substances) has been an issue at Thorn Cross, with the drugs being taken both within the Prison and while on ROTL. In 2014-15 there were two assaults by prisoners on Officers, one of which led to the officer spending time in hospital, but fortunately there have been none of these this year. However the prosecution of the prisoner responsible failed in one of these cases, and relationships between the Prison and the Cheshire Police/CPS need building to ensure justice is seen to be done should such incidents occur again.
- 4.5 The Prison has been fortunate in that there have been no major incidents during the reporting period. However there was an overdose of medication which might have been an attempted suicide, and this was investigated. Use of Cannabis and other drugs appeared to fall as NPS use increased, but the publicity and adverse effects regarding the use of NPS does seem to be leading to a reduction in use, and the number of MDT failures is on the increase again, although still within targets. Very few prisoners are on Methadone programmes (although this is more prevalent amongst the older prisoners). ACCT events are rare.
- 4.6 While a zero tolerance policy for Drugs and NPS in particular might be desirable, the implementation of this is accepted as being problematic, with the risks of absconds etc increasing. The case by case approach is seen to be more effective long term, with ship out to closed conditions being seen as a last resort.
- 4.7 The increased use of Peer Mentors and their increased responsibilities have led to significant improvements in terms of Prisoner Links and communications between prisoners and Staff. New initiatives, in the form of drop in sessions, newsletters, formal and informal discussion groups with the Governors and more mature prisoners have been beneficial to all. However, actions which have been agreed are often many months in implementation, and seemingly trivial proposals can recycle endlessly.

- 4.8 Inconsistencies across the Prison Estate continue to give frustration to prisoners arriving at Thorn Cross, and adverse comparisons with other prisons are made , although these are rarely . However, a significant number of complaints are related to issues where previous institutions, particularly private prisons, take a different line in interpreting prison rules, and unravelling these is an unnecessary work load for the Prison and the IMB.
- 4.9 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, However, as these activities are planned to coincide with a known release date, those without this target can justifiably complain when other, more recently arrived prisoners seem to be getting precedence. Some feel that their expectations in coming to Thorn Cross are unfulfilled.
- 4.10 Release on Temporary License (ROTL) is a key feature of the regime at Thorn Cross. 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. In the last year, the prison arranged nearly 15000 ROTL events. The receipt of only 22 formal complaints to the IMB about ROTL is an indication that the system works very well, although it is not infallible.
- 4.11 The requirements of Fair and Sustainable and Benchmarking have largely been met and the staff operating regimes are now accepted, with the Prison in a “steady state.” However, unfamiliarity with prisoners as staff change location and shifts continues to cause problems but on the whole prison officers work well with the Prisoners and Governors. Confronting prisoners for minor misdemeanours, particularly in the night period, with only one officer per unit on duty, is a necessary function, and staff need to be reassured that backup is immediately available should a situation escalate, and any rules which are being broken are made clear to all. There have been real efforts to standardise regimes across units, particularly in the case of the night activities.
- 4.12 Thorn Cross celebrated its 30yrs as an Open Prison in 2015, and while the buildings and grounds are maintained as well as resources permit, the age of some facilities is showing. The older prisoners are generally much more responsible in caring for things, and vandalism has been reduced, but it is disappointing that many of the prisoner complaints and issues raised at Prisoner rep meetings are buildings and equipment related, and actions to resolve these drift on endlessly. Amey are now responsible for the Prison maintenance and the inflexibility of their contracts causes many problems, not least that they are not required to attend meetings where these concerns are discussed and progressed.
- 4.13 The kitchens have risen to the challenge of increased numbers and the food is generally good, given the budget constraints, with most of the issues raised being associated with delivery and serving, particularly where there are special eg Halal, requirements. Effective supervision at the servery is essential. Food Focus Groups help identify preferences and issues but the Board has concerns that the food comments books are little used, and often menu proposals seem to get implemented briefly and then fall by the wayside.
- 4.14 There were no formal or unannounced prison inspections during the reporting period. It is now over 4 years since the last HMIP inspection and the senior management team are gearing up in anticipation of one shortly. While the Board is confident that the Prison will come out well in the next inspection, the long term strategic developments currently taking place should not be compromised, and the attention

to detail required for the inspection process must be part of the these long term strategies.

4.15 The main concerns are as follows

For the attention of the Governor

- The availability of NPS, mobile phones and other contraband items within the Prison Service is a national issue and while Thorn Cross is making strenuous efforts to reduce this problem, more needs to be done. (*ref section 6.2.4, 6.2.5*)
- Effective communication within the prison is the key to an effective regime and the SMT are congratulated on their efforts to maintain and improve these. Shorter lines of communication with greater use of Mentors, drop in sessions, formal and less formal meetings with Prisoners and staff have all helped, and Board sees that it is essential that these processes need to continue as a high priority. (*ref all sections*)
- There is still variation of “custom and practice” between Units in terms of minor rules and facilities, and further 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 and facilities across the Prison. (*ref section 5.8.2*)
- There are numerous minor maintenance issues and repetitive breakdowns of domestic equipment which are ongoing and create annoyance among prisoners as well as wasting a lot of management time. These need to be resolved permanently. Contract and communication arrangements with Amey need to be reviewed to create more cost effective and flexible operation. (*ref section 5.8.1, 5.8.2*)
- The prison has systems in place which ensure that the requirements of the PSIs/PSOs and local instructions to prisoners are met, but many of these depend on the Staff knowing the details of these themselves. The Board is concerned about the lack of precise knowledge of the latest details, and the variations in interpretation that can result. The application of the best standards needs to be encouraged across all the units (*ref section 5.5.4*)
- The need to allocate purposeful activity to prisoners is becoming more problematic as populations increase and external workouts are more difficult to arrange. The work ethic needs to be enforced with prisoner tasks taking a significant proportion of the working day. While leisure activities eg Gym, or sunbathing should not be permitted within these times, greater use of prison resources and grounds should be made outside the core working day. (*ref section 5.4.2*)
- While the IPP and Lifer community have equal access to rehabilitation activities, their lack of defined release dates is perceived to lead to very slow progress towards parole Board targets, and these perceptions need to be removed as far as possible.
- Many of the prison staff work part time or are on shift, so they are not necessarily available for particular tasks or discussions when needed, and their absence causes delays. While it is accepted that this is inevitable given budgetary constraints and staffing levels, mechanisms do need to be in place to ensure that work and other deadlines eg ROTL issues, complaints, etc are achieved regardless of who actually is allocated to the task. (*ref section 6.3.1*)
- 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 (*ref section 5.1.7*)

For the attention of the prison service

- The use of New Psychoactive Substances is a national concern and 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 curtail the use of these materials both within and outside the Prison Community. *(ref section 6.2.4)*
- The assault of a prison officer by a prisoner, who was believed to be under the influence of NPS, at the end of the last reporting period, failed to produce a successful prosecution by the CPS when taken to court. Such situations are very damaging to prison morale and the lack of support from the Cheshire Police and CPS in such situations is unacceptable. If penalties for the possession of NPS within prisons are to be introduced, cooperation of the Police/CPS in enforcing these will be essential if credibility is not to be lost *(ref section 6.2.5)*.
- While the levels of staffing have been assessed as being adequate for a stable regime, high levels of long term sickness (some of which is inevitable, given the age distribution of the Prison Staff), minor and major incidents, unplanned hospital escort duties etc and the more rigorous ROTL policies have led to the non availability of staff and as a result, prisoners activities, including those related to sentence planning can be restricted or delayed. *(ref sections 5.5.11)*
- 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 5.2.1, 5.2.2)*
- 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 6.4.1)*
- Transfer of prisoners between institutions is though external contractors (in the case of Thorn cross this is Geo Amey). Frequently, space on transport is limited and prisoner property has to be left behind. The hurried rationalisation of property to be taken or left leads to poor identification of that left and property is then extremely difficult to retrieve. Contracts for movement of Prisoners need to be reviewed and the contractors held to account for movement of property as well as prisoners. *(ref section 5.8.6)*
- The contracts with suppliers of services to Thorn Cross (and most probably to other prisons in the area as well) appear to be viewed as a profit opportunity by the contractor rather than a service provision with strict control of costs. This includes services like Education and Training, Maintenance and Repairs and Catering provisions. These contracts need to be more effectively aligned with local needs and the proposals for more autonomy for service provision for Prisons are welcomed and it is hoped Thorn Cross will be in the forefront of these changes. *(ref section 5.2.1)*

- Successful resettlement of prisoners is heavily dependent of the availability of a job and the relevant skills when leaving. It is essential that skills training within Thorn Cross provide relevant qualifications which will lead to a realistic chance of a job, and this includes the gaining of the CSCS card, an essential requirement if a job is to be had in the construction industry. *(ref section 5.2.6)*

For the attention of the Minister

- The use of NPS is an issue which is must be controlled through legislation, education, internal policing or a combination of these. Its availability in prisons is leading to serious social and management problems which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Penalties for possession or trading of these substances within the prison will need to be strictly enforced, and this will require greater cooperation with the Cheshire police than appears to be currently the case. *(ref section 6.2.4)*
- The availability and use of mobile Phones and other devices which have a high currency value within the prison needs to be addressed, and more sophisticate methods of electronic disablement introduced. *(ref section 5.7.4)*
- Despite the Government policy of endorsing the education, rehabilitation and resettlement process, Thorn Cross has seen funding for these key areas severely cut. The targets and budgets for the prison service need to be aligned so that results required are realistically achievable, and vocational courses provide marketable qualifications for the prisoners. *(ref section 5.2)*
- Attention is drawn to the recommendations made to the Prison Service, which are largely a repeat of those of the previous years' report. These are also national issues and should be actively progressed, and properly resolved.

Update on previous year's concerns

- It is disappointing to the Board that the concerns to the Prison Service as reported in the last three Board reports show no real progress in achieving results. While the Prison has been very successful in making the best use of its available resources, there are still serious issues to be addressed, and it is hoped that currently proposed changes within the Prison estate will lead to more positive long term improvements and increased local control.
- 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 moves to improve Staff/Prisoner communications and addressing many of the ROTL issues.
- Education and training provision has been revised and working opportunities increased, but it is still disappointing to find many vocational and education courses under occupied and prisoners, while in theory being engaged in productive activity, are spending a lot of time doing little or nothing.

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 issues and oversees relevant policy development. A staff member has a proportion of his time allocated to these activities and follows up reports of inappropriate comments and behaviour from both Prisoners and Staff.
- 5.1.2 Meetings are chaired at a senior level, and progress on developments are monitored through an action plan. Subgroups of prisoners and staff look at particular areas of interest and there is a high degree of commitment to ensuring that Diversity and related issues are handled correctly. 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. Prison and partnership staff report on their special areas of expertise.
- 5.1.3 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. However, the “race card” seems to be used more frequently than in previous years when Board members are talking to prisoners from ethnic and racial minorities about their problems.
- 5.1.4 An over 50 age group has informal meetings and provides feedback from their representatives. Gym and other activities are being tailored to meet the needs of the less active prisoners and prisoners with physical impairments are very well supported.
- 5.1.5 Discrimination Incident Report Forms are used routinely to report incidents, most of which relate to verbal abuse, but some are concerned with issues such as food handling. There were about 16 of these during the reporting period and all were investigated and responded to in a thorough manner. 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.
- 5.1.6 Thorn Cross has a wide cross section of Faiths and Festivals and celebrations are well publicised and needs are met as far as is practicable through the Chaplaincy team, the Kitchens, the Canteen lists and other provisions. 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 frequency of meetings has decreased, and meetings are often rushed, with limited time to absorb details which may be glossed over, and progress on actions can be very slow. 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 – now rebranded as NOVUS, 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. There have been various

organisational changes within the NOVUS and prison management structures and new staff are starting to review and revise the previous programmes. The partnership agreements between NOVUS and Thorn Cross are important to establish that extra demands for services not specifically written into their main contracts can be accommodated. Historical transfers of budgets from underspending prisons seem to have ceased and prisons who have not met their targets eg in literacy and numeracy, are no longer having to pay for the additional work then required by Thorn Cross, so these services have to be supported from elsewhere.

- 5.2.2 Non-OLASS activities have been similarly targeted, with suitable qualifications identified for the Gym, Farms and Gardens etc. The Board is delighted that the Manager of this area has received Butler Trust awards for his outstanding efforts. To overcome some of the literacy and numeracy issues greater emphasis has been placed on learning “on the job” with NOVUS providing additional support, which seems to be working well. 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. However, numerous planning and other issues have delayed opening, and another year has passed without any sign of a completion date.
- 5.2.3 The range of classes and workshops has changed over the reporting period, with more emphasis being placed on Vocational Courses which provide level 2 qualifications, to enable prisoner to develop skills to help them obtain jobs when they leave. However, the Motor Mechanics workshop, which was a very well equipped, could only provide Level 1 qualifications, has been closed. The Industrial cleaning operations has reduced its activities and now only provides basic training part time, to equip prisoners for “in house” activities. Many of the prisoners arriving at Thorn Cross already have cleaning qualifications gained elsewhere. 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, and the work is of a high standard.
- 5.2.4 The Art class continued to produce some very impressive work and in the first part of the year expanded into renovating furniture which is sold in a local charity shops and will shortly be available through the Farm Shop. Budgetary constraints and retirement of staff have led to activities being restricted to mornings, but it is still thriving. The staff mess, run by the Prisoners, continues to provide an excellent service. The library, operated by Warrington Live Wire provides a quiet, stress-free environment and is well used.
- 5.2.5 The on site work opportunities at Thorn Cross are increasingly important as restrictions and availability of work outside the prison increase. Poor behaviour of Prisoners on workouts has led to a number of arrangements with companies being stopped and numbers dropped to about 30 at one stage. This has now increased and about 60 prisoners work outside the prison on a regular basis. The PPO guidelines on prisoner employment are being implemented with employers, with job quality and payment improvements. Workshops managed by Timpsons/Max Spielman give opportunities to Prisoners to earn good (by prison standards) wages and learn skills which could lead to later work opportunities. It is intended to expand the Timpsons operation to give further employment, but there is a concern that while Timpsons are making a considerable investment and employing quite a large number of their own staff, the number of prisoners actually employed by them is low (7-10 typically). A significant success is the introduction of electrical equipment dismantling and recycling of components through the “Recycling Lives” organisation. This is a well paid piecework operation which has generated a lot of energy and enthusiasm from

both Prisoners and Staff, and more of these, largely unskilled activities are required.

- 5.2.6 Prisoners have previously been able to do the test and obtain the CSCS card, which is essential for obtaining work in the building sector, thanks to a mobile vehicle supported by Carillion. However, there have been a number of outstanding administration and security issues plus a cost, which have delayed its use and effectiveness, and the system seems to have stopped working. As this card is essentially a passport to a building site and future jobs, it is unacceptable that it is not a priority to ensure that all Prisoners who undertake skills training in these areas have the opportunity to get this document before they leave prison.
- 5.2.7 The Virtual Campus, which provides an important capability within education and training is operational, and 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. It is very pleasing to note that a number of Prisoners are studying for openuniversity qualifications, and are provided with resources to enable them to do the appropriate research within and outside the Prison.

5.3 Healthcare and Mental Health

- 5.3.1 Healthcare have continued to have a challenging year providing a service for all age groups. It has been pleasing to note that the department has undergone refurbishment allowing for a dedicated reception area and extra consulting/ clinical rooms. The medical service is now provided by the medical staff that provide services to other establishments in the North West (HMP Risley and HMP Hindley) which has been beneficial in having medical staff that are fully cognisant of health care within a prison setting. There are now Doctor sessions every day. Mental Health services are now provided by Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Trust providing one clinic per week.
- 5.3.2 The staff continue to hold chronic disease management clinics for long term conditions such as 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. All new reception prisoners are offered blood borne virus screening and there has been a good uptake. The full vaccination programmes appropriate for the age and range of prisoners continue
- 5.3.3 There are now in house optician clinics and a local optometrist deals with the diabetic retinopathy screening. As with the older age group of prisoners there has been increasing numbers of diabetic patients within the establishment. The dental service is now well established following the appointment of a dentist with weekly clinical sessions.
- 5.3.4 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
- 5.3.5 Nurse staffing has remained stable and at the time of reporting they are up to full establishment. All staff have attended the Intermediate Life Support course and have recently resourced new “Medical Grab bags” to take when attending an emergency which contains all the necessary equipment and drugs to deal with respiratory or

other physiological emergencies. The staff work collaboratively with staff at HMP Risley and HMP Hindley in particular with medical IT and Pharmacy.

- 5.3.6 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 a resulting increase in spending on medications. However, 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.
- 5.3.7 In possession medications is currently under review, and a repeat prescriptions service for those on long term medication is now working. An ongoing development within this year has been the further development of System One and electronic prescribing, there have been some issues but as they arise they are being resolved. The department is working towards being “paperless” and this work is undergoing a trial.

5.4 Purposeful Activity

- 5.4.1 The training and education and work opportunities described above are usually sufficient to provide places for the capacity population for at least part of the working day.
- 5.4.2 The labour allocation board ensures that all prisoners are allocated to appropriate activities, and as the prison capacity is reached, this is becoming more difficult. Many of these jobs or activities are nominal and little supervised (eg Unit Cleaners). As a result many prisoners finish their tasks quickly and appear to be hanging around, with little or no purposeful activity and no supervision. The Board has concerns that the “work ethic” is seriously lacking with some prisoners, and the “holiday camp” atmosphere in the summer with little regard to dress codes, smoking and general behaviour is becoming more prevalent. Prisoners still seem to leave classes for other appointments or activities, and do not return, so often these are under occupied, and whilst this will sometimes be necessary, education and training and a full working day must remain a priority for prisoners. When an appointment has been completed a Prisoner should be expected to return to their class rather than skive off or try to go to the Gym. 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. The prison is aware of these issues and programmes have started to tackle these.
- 5.4.3 Approximately 20% of prisoners are on workouts of various sorts, and most of these are successful, although a serious failure in one area led to the loss of a significant work out opportunity for others. The budgetary constraints and reduced staff numbers limit the levels of supervision available, and unfortunately, if incidents occur or staff have to be taken away for escort duties the regime can be seriously curtailed. Instances have occurred when the prisoners have been locked down to enable staff to undertake general training activities, and if Prisoners have ROTL or sentence related activities eg Community Voluntary Service (CVS) or escorted visits curtailed, this causes resentment.

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 leading to a reduced risk of long term re-offending on release. .

5.5.2 The OMU department at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross currently has well trained staff, case managers and offender supervisors, of which 12 Uniformed Offender Supervisors are on shift within the Units (3-4 on duty at any one time) . Offenders are split into two groups restricted and standard. Restricted offenders are those who are high or very high risk of harm, IPP/Lifers and any MAPPA cases. These are managed by 5 Probation Offender Supervisors. All other offenders are classed as standard offenders and are managed by the Uniformed Offender Supervisors

5.5.3 The past year has been a busy one for the OMU at Thorn Cross. Of order 15000 ROTL events have been processed, with the vast majority having successful outcomes. They have seen the implementation of a new ROTL policy, Enhanced Behaviour Monitoring and a new Interdepartmental Risk Management Meeting.

In May 2015 a new ROTL policy was issued from the centre with an implementation date of June/July 15. This led to new systems and procedures for both staff and offenders to become familiar with. Although there have been some teething issues along the way, the policy is now firmly embedded with both staff and prisoners feeling comfortable with the processes. Following the implementation of the policy the OMU saw a dramatic increase in the amount of request complaints into the department. These have now reduced significantly and it is felt that this is due to the offenders understanding the processes in more depth, coupled with the availability of a comprehensive written Local Policy guideline.

5.5.4 An OMU surgery is held every Friday afternoon, which is open to all offenders to ask any OMU related questions – this has proved to be very popular with offenders and between 30 – 40 prisoners attend each week. The main queries received are relating to ROTL and where the offenders are up to within the ROTL process. Most queries are answered in the surgery, any outstanding are dealt with in a timely manner. The revised ROTL policies have been implemented and guidelines issued, which avoid some of the many queries which arise from perceived preferential treatment of others

5.5.5 The Enhanced Behaviour Monitoring Process was brought online in Jan 16. This is a multidisciplinary approach to identifying and managing offenders who are displaying risk related behaviours whilst in custody. This process has been running for approximately five months and regular review meetings are held with key stakeholders such as probation and psychology services. There have been 10 prisoners managed through this process so far.

5.5.6 The department has introduced an Interdepartmental Risk Management Meeting within the past twelve months. This is a multi-disciplinary meeting and involves members of staff and stakeholders from all areas within the establishment. It is held on the first Monday of every month and all aspects of public protection and risk management are discussed at the meeting..

5.5.7 The OMU investment in a teleconferencing system has improved the participation in sentence planning by Offender Managers and also acts as a vital back up to oral hearings, which might be taking place by video link. The Lifer/IPP population has

increased over the past year from about 30 to 50 plus offenders, which has meant the OMU has seen a rise in the number of Oral Hearings held.

- 5.5.8 Links continue to be very positive between Thorn Cross and Population Management Unit which assists in keeping them at full operational capacity. Thorn Cross have also been very proactive in visiting their feeder establishments along with their offender mentors to promote the benefits of offenders moving on to Thorn Cross. To date roadshows have been held at Stoke Heath and Buckley Hall. There are plans to take the roadshows into Risley and Hindley.
- 5.5.9 Relationships continue to be strong between Thorn Cross and Stonham BASS in terms of accommodation for HDC. Although the number of referrals have dwindled due to the population age increase, sentence length and higher numbers of ISPP/Lifers, the Prison is actively promoting Stonham BASS via the TV links on the units and also in the Thorn Cross newsletter. The prison has regular contact with Stonham BASS and they have attended Thorn Cross to brief the mentors regarding their role.
- 5.5.10 The OMU also link in regularly with the other stakeholders within the prison. They work closely with Communities Resettlement Companies (Shelter), National Careers Service and Job Centre plus to ensure that smooth progression of the offenders sentence can take place. All stakeholders within the establishment are encouraged to attend the bi-monthly OMU meeting. The new CRC approach has been operational for about a year, and the outcomes from this approach need evaluation.
- 5.5.11 The programme of resettlement is phased over the length of sentence remaining and is planned for each prisoner, so prisoners with shorter remaining sentences can appear to move faster than those with longer sentences remaining. However, the programmes are sometimes limited by non availability of staff, and the occasions when CVS and other external activities are cancelled seems to be on the increase.
- 5.5.12 Thorn Cross is located within a residential area and adjacent to a primary school. The Prison is making efforts to ensure that there is community involvement and understanding of any proposed regime changes. When it eventually opens, the farm shop should also help to establish links with the community, although most of the delays with this have been attributed to local planning concerns from the neighbours.

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 gang 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 6 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.
- 5.6.5 The Peer Mentor scheme has been expanded and they do an excellent job in providing 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, as well as being responsible for organising and delivering the Induction Programmes. The Mentors have an office in the Concourse and it is planned to install a telephone to enable them to talk directly with Prison Staff about relevant issues, which will speed up their problem solving abilities.

5.7 Care and Separation

- 5.7.1 Unit 6 was originally the Care and Separation Unit but this was converted into double cell accommodation in January 2013 for newly arrived prisoners. There are still 4 single cells which can be separated off from the main unit and these have been used on rare occasions to house a violent or difficult prisoner overnight or for a short duration before shipment to closed conditions. The Board are notified whenever this facility is used.
- 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 IEP reviews are carried out as appropriate. 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 most adjudications are followed up, but a formal audit of the full process may be appropriate.
- 5.7.3 Following adjudication at Thorn Cross, a ROTL review board is now held to ensure that offenders continue to remain suitable for ROTL. The review boards are chaired by a band 5 and a band 7 for consistency. External adjudicators have not been called to Thorn Cross during the reporting period, and no additional days given.
- 5.7.4 Contraband, in particular mobile phones and sim cards continue to be smuggled into the Prison and are found through searches and other means. As these are high value currency items it is important that ways of preventing their use within the prison are developed so their use becomes impossible.

5.8 Residential Services

- 5.8.1 Thorn Cross held its 30 year celebrations in 2015. The residential units are generally clean and well-maintained, but the buildings are starting to show their age and upkeep is an increasing struggle. Vandalism has decreased with the influx of older prisoners and the Works Department has been able to keep on top of most routine issues, recording 100% completions, although some units are more badly affected than

others and drains blockages are an ongoing concern.

- 5.8.2 Seemingly minor issues are debated extensively within prison liaison meetings and elsewhere, and even when agreed, solutions seem to be unachievable. Issues such as 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, and approaches on units are inconsistent. Equipment failures – washers, dyers, kettles, microwaves, toasters, showers are continuous, often a result of poor equipment specification and use, and issues such as mould and damp, from poorly installed or maintained systems are prevalent. The contract with Amey is very restrictive, and budgets do not allow for local initiatives and cost control, with cost estimates seeming excessive and minor activities becoming major issues on long timescales. Trivial issues, such as the provision of heating in parts of the buildings eg the conference rooms are not properly addressed, and foreseen needs, such as additional plugs for Fridges on the Units, which have been promised for over a year, are not installed, creating further delays. There may be issues with the Planet FM reporting system for maintenance activities and if Amey are not informed of the need for work, they will not take it on board. Actions agreed need to be properly logged with Amey, and their completion of these, claimed to be 100% should be monitored.
- 5.8.3 The Kitchens are well run and clean, but many of the staff are part time. However, reinforced by a number of effective prisoner helpers, they are able to provide good meals, and these are observed regularly by the Board to be sufficient and of adequate quality. Food leaves the kitchens in heated trolleys, which are loaded as it is prepared and the time taken before serving can be significant. Problems exist with meal times overlapping health care appointments, wash ups etc, and provision of meals for those working out or coming in late. Some of these prisoners have ready meals which can be microwaved, and special diets, diabetic supplements and Halal food is available.
- 5.8.4 The use of small foil trays to package up portions seems to have resolved a number of the issues around portion control at the serveries and although it adds a small amount to the costs, it seems worthwhile. Problems of missing items which were originally supplied by the Kitchen are still reported, and close supervision of the servery, and the delivery of the food from the kitchen, is necessary. The use of non Halal utensils or poor practice in the serveries have caused concerns, and standards of servery operation and supervision across the units can be variable. Many of the older prisoners eat their meals in their rooms and supplement their prison food with bought in supplies, and “home cooking” is on the increase – to the detriment of the very limited kitchen facilities and equipment. No complaints related to food have been received by the IMB this year.
- 5.8.5 Food comments books are available on the units, and are checked on a routine basis by a Governor and Kitchen Staff, but are little used. Adverse verbal comments about the food quality and quantity seem to be increasing again and the issues are addressed through the Prison Reps meetings and a Food Focus Group. Improvements are made following demands, but many seem short lived – eg the provision of soup at lunchtime during the winter months, was on an occasional, seemingly random basis, and information requested on the calorific content of menus was sidelined. Views may be based more on the personal preferences of those who attend meetings rather than the majority of the Prison population, and while surveys of preferences do take place, participation levels are low.
- 5.8.6 Prisoner property still causes issues, particularly when prisoners arrive from other establishments. Sometimes the transportation (by GeoAmey) is full, and property has

to be left behind. The transport contract allows for 3 bags but if there is not room for these, prisoners may be told which of their bags they can bring, with no choice in the matter, or they have to do a rapid sorting. Prisoner belongings actually taken or left may be unrecorded and/or misplaced. Personal items that are then supposed to be sent on can take several weeks to arrive and arrive in dribs and drabs or do not arrive at all. This leads to real difficulties for prisoners and can be distressing when personal property and documents are lost. In an extreme case, a prisoner arriving at Thorn Cross had his personal documents sent to another prisoner with the same name and initial but slightly different number at a different establishment. This is still under investigation.

- 5.8.7 Unit 7 has now been established as a full unit containing 60 prisoners in large double cells. Refurbishing work was carried out by the Prison Service team before Amey took over and a number of problems have developed which have taken a long time to resolve under the new maintenance arrangements. Issues such as leakage from the top floor showers leading to damp in the room below still require resolution.
- 5.8.8 Initially Unit 7 was to be used for prisoners in the last few months of their sentence or who were on workouts, but this met with opposition from Prisoners who did not want to share cells after having had single cells for most of their time at Thorn Cross. This view has prevailed, and some prisoners on work-outs continue to be spread across the estate but this has not caused any issues.
- 5.8.9 The current situation is that on arrival to Thorn Cross prisoners are placed in Unit 6. Although designed for single use each cell is now used to house two prisoners. The accommodation is cramped and offers little or no privacy. The intention is that prisoners only spend the first 2/3 nights there before being allocated to a Unit. For the first 6 months of the reporting period, however prisoners stayed longer than that with some staying up to two weeks on Unit 6. Thorn Cross, in common with other establishments does not have much control over how many prisoners are sent and the Unit 6 has been running at full capacity. Towards the end of the reporting period the situation had eased somewhat and sometimes it was possible to allocate just one prisoner to a cell, which is more acceptable. Prisoners now arriving at Thorn Cross go into shared cells in Unit 6. If space becomes available on Unit 7 they will then move there to share a cell until a single cell becomes available elsewhere, or alternatively go directly to one of the single cells units if unit 7 is full. This system seems to work, in that Unit 7 is now usually fully occupied, and some prisoners are happy to share cells, given the extra space Unit 7 has to offer, However, the Unit 6 to Unit 7 to single cell units can lead to new prisoners moving twice in a relatively short space of time and can be unsettling.
- 5.8.10 The prison has adopted a no smoking policy within the Units and Prisoner's own cells, with designated smoking areas being provided. While this has led to dissatisfaction among the smoking population, it has been successfully implemented. However, use of the designated areas for smoking is not strictly enforced, and one or two non smokers have complained that they are unable to use these outdoor spaces because of the passive smoking issues, particularly that of Cannabis and NPS.

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. A 5 minute intervention programme is being developed in an effort to highlight unacceptable behaviour and improve communications between prisoners and staff.
- 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, and 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 cause concerns.
- 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. “Meet the Governor” sessions have been held on a routine basis and a News Letter is published by the Prisoners. These and other initiatives are positive ways of improving staff/prisoner relationships.
- 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

6.2 Substance misuse

- 6.2.1 The Pathways service has been relaunched as CGL (Change, Grow, Live) which better reflects its activities in the rehabilitation of drug users and those with long term drug problems. The small group works in conjunction with a similar team at Risley and a wide variety of support services in the Warrington area. A number of mentors support the team and are highly valued in their ability to interact with prisoners and speak from their personal experiences with drugs.
- 6.2.2 The team provide support for over a third of all the Prisoners at Thorn Cross, and the programme extends throughout the prisoner’s time at the prison and afterwards into the Community. The one to one approach offers the best results. There have been outstanding successes, although the amount of time that is devoted to individual cases is considerable. CGL is about creating a recovery community – a place where

individuals can come together. Each week there are different events, for instance the Friday café, Saturday Chess Club, smoking cessation, and relaxation and mindfulness sessions.

- 6.2.3 The use of Methadone treatment programmes has increased as the prisoner age range has increased, reflecting historical abuse, but numbers are relatively low. The use of NPS initially displaced the softer drugs which are susceptible to detection in the mandatory drugs testing programme, so MDT failures decreased. However, with the more recent reductions in the use of NPS, these are on the increase again, although still within the acceptable limits.
- 6.2.4 The use of New Psychoactive Substances is a concern which is believed to have led to a number of incidents at Thorn Cross, particularly when prisoners have returned from ROTL. Staff have to be much more aware of the possibility of such incidents and be prepared for them. While there have been no significant finds of NPS within the prison, there is little doubt that they are available, and are used. Efforts are being made to discourage use through publicity and counselling, and these approaches seem to be working, in that most prisoners seem to realise the harmful nature of NPS and would prefer to use something they know rather than face the unpredictability of these materials. However, 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, together with severe penalties for their possession and distribution which are seen to be enforced.
- 6.2.5 While steps are being taken to adopt best practice in detection of NPS and advice against use, incidents have occurred in the previous reporting period which led to the hospitalisation of staff. While one prisoner received an additional 2 years sentence for his behaviour, in another, the case was dismissed, despite evidence being presented. This leads to a major loss of morale among Prison Staff, and more needs to be done to provide effective police and CPS support for such incidents.

6.3 Complaints

- 6.3.1 The prison complaints system generally operates according to the required standards, although there can be delays when the part time staff who deal with these are away, and the Board has come across instances of prisoners names and numbers being confused when replies are made – not just at Thorn Cross. The Complaints are responded to by an appropriate manager or officer. A total of 754 complaints were received during the reporting period, a significant number of which were Comp 1A, a recycle of a previous complaint for which the response was felt to be unsatisfactory. The number also includes the confidential access reports. Complaints are analysed regularly and discussed by the SMT/PAM meetings. The process has just been computerised, with the respondents being sent copies of the complaint electronically, which should speedup the process. An analysis of the complaints showed that the numbers and topics followed the same trends as the applications to the IMB, the applicant normally having been through the complaints process before approaching the IMB, which is what would be expected.
- 6.3.2 Issues like Prisoners Money and how it is handled still cause confusion among both Prisoners and Staff, and work is needed to ensure a consistent approach both within Thorn Cross and throughout the Prison service.

6.4 **Chaplaincy**

- 6.4.1 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. The Chaplaincy has involvement with DEAT, Safer Custody and all aspects of Prison Life, and help to organise activities and events in conjunction with outside groups. Halle 4 Brass, concerts and other initiatives make very positive impact on Prisoner life.

6.5 **Gym**

- 6.5.1 The gym and weights room provide a focus for leisure and training activities, 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, and only prisoners on accredited courses should be using the Gym during normal working time. This does not always seem to be the case. However there is a concern that use of the Gym and other facilities such as the playing fields and the walking routes around the site is sometimes curtailed, particularly at weekends through lack of supervisory staff, or if staff are detailed for duties elsewhere through absence or illness of others.

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	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	4
Number of members leaving within reporting period	2
Total number of Board meetings during reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the Establishment	268
Date of Annual Team Performance Review	April 2016

*Although the official Board complement is 12, the Board consider 8-10 to be the optimum number in present circumstances. One member resigned as a result of a career move and another retired, having done many years of good service, including chairing the Board for 3 years. The Board successfully recruited a further 4 members, 3 of whom had served on Boards elsewhere, and these were appointed after a relatively trouble free interviewing and security clearance process.

The TPR was held in April 2016. This review led to the discussion of a wide range of issues and a number of recommendations, which are in the process of being implemented. The new Monitoring Framework was accepted and its recommendations adopted.

The total number of visits to the prison at 268 is slightly higher than the 225 for 2014-5. This reflects the needs of recruitment and training of 4 new members and the additional involvement of members in new prisoner inductions and of other prison and prisoner activities. Efforts are made to combine Rota visits with other activities at the prison, but the revised Board structure will mean further increases in prison visits during the next 12 months.

7.2 Applications to the Board

7.2.1 Statistics

Code	Subject	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
A	Accommodation	4	6	1	1	1
B	Adjudications	0	4	14	2	2
C	Equality & Diversity (inc religion)	1	2	2	2	1
D	Education/employment/training inc IEP	8	10	4	4	5
E 1	Family/visits inc mail & phone	3	2	0	2	1
E 2	Finance/pay	0	5	6	6	9
F	Food/kitchen related	2	8	3	1	0
G	Health related	2	5	5	4	4
H 1	Property (within current establishment)	4	5	1	2	2
H 2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	2	8	5	4	1
H 3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	0	1	1	0	0
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	18	24	32	32	22
J	Staff/prisoner/detainee concerns inc bullying	31	13	7	4	1
K	Transfers	2	11	10	1	0
L	Miscellaneous	2	5	2	2	3
	Total number of IMB applications	79	109	90	67	52

- 7.2.2 The continuing reduction 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 and mentors 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, such as changes in ROTL has an adverse effect on prisoner life. The Board application characteristics largely mirror those of the Prison Complaints system. 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, and as in previous years, the largest proportion of applications are related to ROTL and in particular the apparent lack of communication between prisoners and staff regarding the likely outcomes, leading to prisoner expectations which are unfulfilled. Locally published guidelines, drop in sessions and increased availability of Offender Supervisors have clarified many of the issues, and it is hoped the decreasing trends will continue. The work of the OMU in resolving most of the issues raised is highly commended, and based on the number of successful ROTLs, the failure rate is very low indeed.
- 7.2.4 Finance and Prisoner pay applications have shown a significant increase, and there is ongoing confusion on what may or may not be done, and systems in Private prisons can be different to those in the Public sector. While improved guidelines are being developed, these are not yet available.
- 7.2.5 Dissatisfaction with adjudications is low. The Board attends some of these and while adjudicating Governors have different approaches, all carry out their duties fairly and consistently. Where complaints have been made, audits of the particular events and discussions with the Governors concerned have led to the view that the complaints were unsubstantiated.
- 7.2.6 It is pleasing that the applications related to bullying issues continue to decrease, but the Board is always on the lookout for patterns of complaints related to staff members. However, many of the application to the Board claim that the applicant is being discriminated against on the grounds of geographical or religious background, and that this is the reason for ROTL issues or lack of progression on rehabilitation programmes. Investigations showed no evidence of any justification for such claims. As mentioned earlier, the number of DIRFs completed have been stable over the last year. These are all investigated thoroughly by the Prison and have been audited by the Board, and none of the claims against staff have been substantiated.
- 7.2.7 The applications related to Food, 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. While the Board reviewed the visits booking process in detail during the year, there are still concerns that the opportunities for prisoners to be visited is limited and some visitors still have problems making bookings. The websites for the Prison continue to be badly out of date.

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 is sent to the Governor. Findings are shared and discussed with the attending Governor at the monthly meetings. 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, which require a detailed response.
- 7.3.3 Board members have individual responsibilities for areas of special interest and attend Prison meetings as observers, e.g. Safer Custody, Health care, DEAT, PAM, 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 was no longer the case and while older prisoners on longer sentences should know about the IMB and its role, this is not always the case. Recent review of the induction process has enabled the Board to once again provide an input, and this is now being implemented.

7.5 Training and Development

- 7.5.1 The National Training programme is used as the basis for training members of the Board. Three of the new members have attended the probationary year course, which while it was beneficial to the member without previous experience was felt to be inappropriate to those who already had many years of Board activity. A member 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. The Team Performance Review in April 2016 helped to develop to improve capability and monitoring effectiveness, and the actions are being developed and 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, and is very slow at peak times. The Prison Intranet system has been upgraded, and is now felt to be reasonably satisfactory, and efforts are being made to use it to greater effect. However, communication and information extraction depends on physically being in the prison, which is not the way the Board works, and a system whereby Board members can “work from home” would be highly desirable, and also reduce the amount of travelling required.

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

Glossary of Terms used in text

ACCT	Assessment Care and Custody Teamwork
CJSM	Criminal Justice Secure Mail
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
CVS	Community Voluntary Service
DEAT	Diversity and Ethnicity Action Team
DIRF	Discrimination Incident Report Form
HDC	Home Detention Curfew
IEP	Incentives and Earned Privileges
IMB	Independent Monitoring Board
IPP	Imprisonment for Public Protection
MDT	Mandatory Drug Testing
NPS	New Psychoactive Substances
OMU	Offender Management Unit
OS	Offender Supervisor
PAM	Policy and Management
PSI	Prison Service Instructions
PSO	Prison Service Orders
ROTL	Release on Temporary License
SMT	Senior management Team
TPR	Team Performance Review