



Annual Report HMP Thameside

1 July 2015 – 30 June 2016

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Section 1

Summary and conclusions

- 1.1 Throughout the period of this Report (1 July 2015 – 30 June 2016), HMP Thameside continued to be an establishment where the treatment of prisoners was generally fair and humane. Some functions improved, others did not. See *Section 4*
- 1.2 The largest number of complaints received by the prison from prisoners concerns the handling of their property. Sometimes the prison is at fault; sometimes it is another prison, a court or an escort contractor; sometimes it is the system as determined by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) which does not work well. See *para 4.8*
- 1.3 The quality of healthcare has improved during the reporting year but it is still sometimes bedevilled by unnecessary delays and unsatisfactory communication between staff and with prisoners. See *para 4.17 & 4.18*
- 1.4 Whilst the prison takes its duty of care for prisoners seriously, the care and oversight in the first night centre have not always been as pro-active and close as they need to be for men at this particularly vulnerable stage of their imprisonment. See *para 4.25*
- 1.5 Prisoners are not sufficiently encouraged to take full advantage of the educational and training opportunities available to them in the prison. See *para 4.28*
- 1.6 The high quality support that many prisoners need in preparation for their release is not yet reliably provided by the Community Rehabilitation Company. See *para 4.37*
- 1.7 A high proportion of officers are relatively inexperienced and, partly as a consequence, the quality of communication between prisoners and officers is too variable; many prisoners are not sufficiently challenged to address their offending behaviour. See *para 4.42*
- 1.8 The new Director, appointed towards the end of the IMB reporting year, has brought renewed energy to recruiting and training good staff, managing them effectively and generally to smartening up the appearance and operational sharpness of the prison. See *para 4.41*
- 1.9 The IMB received 690 Applications from prisoners during 2015/16, which is a disproportionate increase on 2014/15; as with complaints to the prison, the largest number (a quarter) concerned property followed by a fifth about healthcare. When spoken to, many prisoners said that the prison did not deal with their complaints seriously. See *para 5.3*

Questions for the Minister

- 1.10 What is being done to improve collaboration between all Government departments to promote better opportunities and support for men when they are released from prison?
- 1.11 What is being done to incentivise more companies to come into prisons to work with and help to train offenders?

Question for the Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service

- 1.12 When will a realistic and correctly resourced system for the integrated management of prisoner property throughout their time in custody (including whilst at Court and during transfers) be implemented?

Section 2

Statutory Role of the IMB

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The Board is specifically charged to:
 - (1) satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
 - (2) inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom they have delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
 - (3) **report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.**
- 2.3 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 3

Description of the prison

- 3.1 HMP Thameside opened in 2012 as a Category B local prison, with an operational capacity of 900. In April 2015, an extension opened with an additional capacity of 332, intended for resettlement prisoners (mainly Category C) close to their release date. Throughout the reporting year the prison has been occupied close to its occupational capacity of 1232. It generally held about 100 young offenders, mostly on remand.
- 3.2 The prison benefits from being modern and purpose-built. All cells have integrated toilets and showers, a telephone and in-cell information technology for communication within the prison. Prisoners can opt to pay for access to a limited number of television channels. There is a Care and Separation Unit with 20 cells and a Healthcare Unit with 18 cells for in-patients and surgeries for out-patient consultations.
- 3.3 There is a well-equipped sports academy, a library, an education centre, a multi-faith centre and an activity centre with workshops, classrooms and the potential to accommodate a range of activities suitable for resettlement prisoners.
- 3.4 The prison is managed under contract by Serco Group plc. It has two partner agencies, Catch 22 (focusing on offender management) and Turning Point (issues arising from drug and alcohol misuse).
- 3.5 A range of other centrally contracted organisations provide other services. Education provision is contracted to Novus (previously known as The Manchester College) Healthcare is contracted to the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. Career information and advice is provided by Prospects. The Community Rehabilitation Company is MTC Novo. The escort contractor is Serco Wincanton.

Section 4

Report for the year 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016

- 4.1 The year was a busy one for HMP Thameside. Staff worked hard to deal with the same challenges we reported a year ago as well as new ones. In some areas the outcomes for prisoners improved but in others they declined. In the IMB's judgement, the general quality of a prisoner's experience on 30 June 2016 was much the same as on 1 July 2015.
- 4.2 In Annex 2 we reproduce our report on 2014/15. Where our evaluations are similar, we refer to it and do not describe them again here. This report therefore focuses on what changed in 2015/16.

Fairness

Equality and inclusion

Overview and concerns.

- 4.3 The prison's work in this area continues to be of a good standard but the concerns we noted last year have not diminished (see page 15).

Segregation/care and separation

Overview.

- 4.4 The prison generally holds a small number of persistently disruptive men and the Care and Separation Unit (CSU) is usually occupied to at least 75 per cent of its capacity. As in 2014/15, the Unit has been run well.

Concern.

- 4.5 Although there have been some improvements, adjudications still have to be adjourned for administrative reasons and our other concerns remain (see page 15). In particular, there are too many adjournments because of the non-attendance of officers required to provide evidence.

Complaints

Overview

- 4.6 Prisoners' perception of the fairness of their treatment is strongly influenced by how well their complaints and other concerns are handled. During the first part of the reporting year it was sometimes sub-optimal because of staff shortages and the issue not being given proper priority. Prisoners are asked not to submit Applications to the IMB before they have exhausted the prison's own complaint procedures. Although many do not fully comply, the number of IMB Applications (see Section 5.2 and Annex 1) is a proxy indicator of dissatisfaction with the complaints process.
- 4.7 Taking June 2016 as an example, there were 180 formal written complaints to the prison submitted by prisoners, 88% of which were answered within the time allowed. Even assuming that all the responses were fair and persuasively argued, this left 21 prisoners with some justification for feeling aggrieved. The largest number of complaints by a considerable margin related to property (allegedly lost, stolen or mislaid either within the prison or during transfer into or away from HMP Thameside). This statistic is similar in many prisons, reinforcing the importance of improving the ways that property is managed throughout the prison estate.

Concern

- 4.8 The IMB recognises that keeping prisoners' property safe throughout their time in custody is not straightforward. However, prisoners often feel that there is a lack of urgency in resolving property-related issues that they raise and these delays can cause real anxiety and anger. Explicit recognition of the importance of their property to prisoners is not reliably demonstrated by all staff, who sometimes lack persistence in locating lost items within the prison and so fail to live up to the prison's professed culture of treating prisoners with respect. Losses during transfers reflect the need for a nationally coordinated system.

Humanity

Healthcare and mental health

Overview.

- 4.9 In our 2014/15 report, we stated that the jury was still out on the service being provided by the recently appointed healthcare provider, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (see page 16). We are now able to report with more confidence.
- 4.10 The model for healthcare provision that Oxleas put in place when taking over the contract in 2015 had deficiencies. During the reporting year, the Head of healthcare steered the provision in a better direction, securing funding for additional posts and improving staff recruitment so that there was less reliance on agency nurses. More occupational therapy time is now provided for in-patient prisoners and a new co-ordinator post has speeded up transfer of prisoners with serious mental health issues to secure hospitals or medical secure units. The IMB has been told that the average time for a transfer to be effected is now five weeks, which still means that the prison often holds men for whom it cannot provide proper care for several weeks each.
- 4.11 General practitioners provide daily surgeries in the prison but there have been times during the reporting year when timekeeping was unreliable and prisoners had long waits in the outpatient centre. Such waits may not be unusual in NHS clinics outside of prison but there are added risks when a group of 10-20 men are held in quite a small space for periods of an hour or more, and the IMB observed occasions during 2015/16 when there were significant risks to good order.
- 4.12 The prison holds men who are entitled to social care under the provisions of the Care Act 2014. There has been effective collaboration with the Greenwich local authority to ensure that the necessary support is provided. Over 10 prisoners have been trained as Support and Care Orderlies to help deliver social care under supervision of two support workers.
- 4.13 Sometimes a prisoner requires an external hospital appointment. For good security reasons, the timing of these appointments cannot be divulged in advance, with an inevitable consequence that the individual is sometimes made anxious and fears that he has been forgotten. It is therefore particularly important that when an appointment has been made it is reliably met. This was not always the case during 2015/16, sometimes because of failures in co-ordination between healthcare and custody staff (who have to provide the transport and escort). It is encouraging that the Head of healthcare has secured funding for an extra bed escort per day for visits to hospital.
- 4.14 Complaints from prisoners about their healthcare are handled by Oxleas and do not appear in the prison's own complaints statistics. They are dealt with conscientiously by the Head of healthcare and his colleagues. It is confusing for prisoners that the target response time for a healthcare complaint is the NHS-expected time (21 days) which is different from (longer than) the time for other complaints to the prison.

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- 4.15 The prison tests a random sample of 5% of its population for drugs each month. The average number of positives over the year was 11%. This is too high, and not much below the maximum specified by the Prison Service. Staff in the prison are proactive in trying to prevent drugs entering the prison (for instance through the Visits Hall) and there is zero tolerance if anyone (prisoner, visitor, member of staff) is detected in possession.
- 4.16 Serco's partner organisation, Turning Point, continued to provide services for prisoners with substance misuse issues during 2015/16 (see page 16).

Concerns

- 4.17 One common thread running through many of the issues relating to healthcare in HMP Thameside is delay – from delay getting a broken wheelchair mended to delay supplying colostomy bags to a prisoner who needs them to delay transferring prisoners with severe mental health needs to an appropriate facility. The IMB recognises that some delays are beyond the full control of Oxleas or prison staff but they nevertheless are unfair and/or inhumane for the men concerned.
- 4.18 A second thread, which sometimes contributes to the delays, is unsatisfactory communication or a reluctance by staff to take responsibility for finding answers when they do not themselves know what they should be. Such reluctance is not widespread. Many staff (healthcare professionals and custody officers) regularly take great pains in their care of sick prisoners but, when it occurs, it is damaging.

Safer custody

Overview.

- 4.19 Although prisoners generally tell IMB members that HMP Thameside compares favourably with other Category B local prisons where they have been held, levels of violence and assaults (prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff) have tended to increase. During the first half of 2016 there were on average about 2 serious incidents each week (mainly prisoner on prisoner violence, but also fights involving more than two prisoners and assaults on staff) and a further 8 where the violence was not categorised as 'serious'. The prison has been active in analysing each incident to identify any trends and learn lessons. The prison was unfortunately forced to suspend the operation of its effective Violence Reduction policy for reasons outside of its control. The prison's effective work to minimise gang-related violence has continued.
- 4.20 As we feared last year (see page 17), increased availability and use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) have led to many disturbing physical reactions and caused violent incidents, too often requiring the individual concerned to be taken to hospital. It would be inaccurate to say that the situation has been out of control. The prison has been active in intercepting attempts to smuggle NPS into the prison but the abuse of NPS by prisoners contributed to the level of violence and tied up staff time.
- 4.21 Throughout 2015/16 there were daily incidents of self-harm, many of which were expressions of frustration or attention-seeking. A small proportion were of much more serious intent, most of which were foiled through the vigilance and care of prison staff and/or, in some instances, of other prisoners.
- 4.22 Many prisoners are particularly vulnerable on first arrival. Although care is taken by staff in Reception and the First Night Centre to identify and care for those at greatest risk, there is room for improvement in both areas. The fact that HMP Thameside is often 'compelled' to accept arrivals late in the evening, well after its contractual obligation, militates against risk assessments being completed calmly in Reception because staff and prisoners are tired. Sometimes information received from a court lacks important detail (e.g. that a man had previously been released on licence so he

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faces having this licence revoked and serving the rest of a long sentence). Sometimes staff in the First Night Centre focus on monitoring prisoners with identified vulnerability, failing to recognise that *all* first nighters are potentially vulnerable.

- 4.23 There were two deaths in custody during 2015/16. On the basis of what is known currently, one death was from natural causes as a result of medical conditions the prisoner was suffering on arrival at HMP Thameside. The other death was self-inflicted within 24 hours of first arrival.
- 4.24 The long delays in arranging inquests that we have come to expect, whilst continuing to regard them as disgraceful (see the IMB Annual Reports for 2013/14 and 2014/15), mean that the circumstances of neither death have been formally and finally clarified.

Concerns

- 4.25 The Board recognises that identifying which men are seriously vulnerable when first remanded to the prison, and then monitoring them reliably and effectively, is seriously challenging. It requires accurate and timely communication between the police, the courts and HMP Thameside, and between the staff who interview men on arrival and those who manage them in the First Night Centre. It is an area of work where further improvements are still needed.

Preparation for release

Education, learning and skills

Overview

- 4.26 The Manchester College, now rebranded as Novus, took over the delivery of education learning and skills early in 2015. Last year, we reported that the provision had ‘trod water’ (see page 17). The Board has no evidence (in terms of comments from prisoners) that the quality of courses is not at least as good as it was when Ofsted last inspected in 2014, and those prisoners who attend can be enthusiastic about what they receive. Access to the ‘virtual campus’ is now available.
- 4.27 The well-stocked and attractive library continues to deliver a wide range of impressive services, including the involvement of various charities and schemes for delivery of reading encouragement, and activities including a weekly book club, which has been attended by some well-known authors and celebrities during the year. The prison’s librarian won a Butler Trust Award for the “outstanding dedication, skill and creativity he has shown in transforming the prison’s library into a dynamic learning and resource centre, much valued by prisoners and staff, and described as ‘the envy of other prisons’ “.

Concern

- 4.28 The ‘marketing’ of the education, learning and skills provision to prisoners is not effective enough. Many prisoners who could benefit from improving their skills (from those who need help with basic literacy and numeracy to others who would benefit from higher level learning) are not engaged and so miss opportunities to improve their employability on release.
- 4.29 The focus on preparation for release through education programmes was not sharp enough throughout the reporting year.

Purposeful activity

Overview

- 4.30 There are still insufficient purposeful occupations available for the number of men held in the prison. Staff take trouble to allocate work and other activities to prisoners in a

fair way. However, when the prison was originally designed the expected population was to be 75% remand prisoners, who are under no obligation to work. The current remand population is about 30% so the number of convicted individuals needing purposeful activity is correspondingly higher than planned.

- 4.31 The activity block providing training for work is still not operating to capacity, in part because of difficulty obtaining external contracts for services. For example, the laundry has considerable spare capacity but, on 30 June 2016, no external clients for laundry services had been found. The prison 'makes' as many job opportunities as it can but at the expense of over-manning in some areas, which inevitably reduces the value of the jobs themselves.

Concerns

- 4.32 The prison fully recognises the importance of developing better opportunities for purposeful activity for more prisoners, and the key role this should play in improving rehabilitation and resettlement. However, given the prison's location and facilities, this is a major challenge that will be difficult to meet effectively, despite great effort in identifying and working with potential employers and providers of training, and deploying an increased staff resource.

Resettlement

Overview

- 4.33 Those prisoners who maintain good links with their families are more likely to resettle well following their release. This continues to be an area of strength at HMP Thameside. Facilities and arrangements for visiting the prison by family and friends are of a high standard. Changes to visiting sessions and times were managed well. Monthly activities enjoyed by prisoners and their families included: Family Days held alternately in the Visits Hall and the Gym; Sunday Brunch, when children and grandchildren can do their homework or play educational games, with their fathers/grandfathers; Toddler Time; Music & Movement; and Treasure Box activities when men decorate boxes and fill them with handmade toys made during their sentences. Award ceremonies are regularly held with families invited to see presentations to prisoners who have achieved a milestone in mentor, educational and vocational training schemes.
- 4.34 Prospects, the contractor for the National Careers Service, focuses on prisoners with 6 months or less to serve before discharge¹.
- 4.35 At the time of writing our last report, it was too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of a new national system in which Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) took over a range of responsibilities previously handled directly by the prison or the Probation Service. The CRC is responsible for all pre-release and release planning for an offenders' accommodation, employment, education, training etc². The MTC Novo

¹ The team have a weekly list of around 125 prisoners who attend workshops followed by a face-to-face or telephone interview. These interviews are for discussing work the prisoner wishes to do in prison and they provide an opportunity to discuss and advise prisoners on work and training opportunities on release. JobCentre Plus runs five days a week in the prison.

² The system requires a Basic Custody Screening(BCS) to be completed for all those in custody to identify both immediate and resettlement needs. It comprises two parts. Part 1 is carried out by prison staff as part of the reception and induction process, and should happen within 72 hours of admission. The results inform Part 2 of the BCS which forms the resettlement plan created by the CRC. BCS Part 2 must be completed by the CRC within 5 days of receiving the completed BCS Part 1 from the prison.

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consortium is the contractor for HMP Thameside and Catch 22, part of the consortium, has recently taken over management of the CRC within the prison. There has been a process of restructuring as a result.

- 4.36 During 2015/16 both the prison and the CRC have struggled to implement the BCS processes in a timely way. There have been difficulties recruiting the staff required and the volume of screening assessments is high – 350 a month on average during the first half of 2016. In the event, about 95% have been completed within the target time. The IMB's current assessment is that the CRC staff generally manage to complete the assessments required but are struggling to deliver all the services to prisoners that those assessments indicate are needed. This is a priority area for more focused IMB monitoring during 2016/17.

Concern

- 4.37 Use of the BCS processes to identify and deliver the reliable and high quality support that many prisoners require on their release is still a work in progress, disadvantaging current cohorts of prisoners as they approach their release.
- 4.38 A national climate of support for released prisoners is needed. The IMB recognises that not all are reformed characters but it is in society's interest (in terms of cost and safety) to reduce recidivism to the minimum and to collaborate with prisons working to this end. HMP Thameside could do better, and so could employers and civil society more generally.

Residential services

Overview

- 4.39 Although the range of examples that might be quoted are different, the overview and concerns expressed in our 2014/15 report remained valid throughout 2015/16 (see pages 18-19).
- 4.40 HMP Thameside faces particular challenges. There is a rapid turnover of prisoners, many of whom stay in the establishment for a few weeks (or months at the most), so the prison's systems need to be transparent and instantly comprehensible. Many of the men have mental health and/or substance misuse issues which exacerbate the difficulties of communicating with them. Although the prison has benefitted from a stable group of experienced senior managers, many Custody Officers, who are on the frontline in terms of day-to-day contact with prisoners, are young and inexperienced. Most do very good work, but their youth and lack of knowledge about every aspect of prison life can damage their credibility with more experienced prisoners. Excellent communication with them, to guide them and enhance their skills rapidly through mentoring by their managers, is vital.
- 4.41 There has been a commitment to staff development and training throughout the year. It has been given new impetus by Craig Thomson, who assumed the position of Director in April 2016. He is approaching the challenges listed above with energy and imagination, and a renewed emphasis on smartening the appearance of the prison internally and externally. Changes are already in train. It is too soon to evaluate their impact on prisoners, which will be a topic for our 2016/17 Report.

Concerns

- 4.42 The quality of communication between prisoners and officers about day-to-day matters of proper concern to prisoners is variable. In part this is because of the relatively high proportion of officers who are inexperienced; some officers do not feel they have

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sufficient time to develop good quality communication with prisoners. When such time is not found, prisoners suffer.

- 4.43 The quality of supervision of the work of prisoner orderlies is variable and sometimes wings and serveries are not as clean as they should be because the oversight of cleaners is not close enough.
- 4.44 The routine maintenance of furniture and equipment on wings and in cells sometimes appears to be casual, either because problems are not reported promptly or because there are delays in making necessary repairs.

Section 5

Work of the IMB

- 5.1 On 1 July 2015 the IMB had 11 members, including two who were also members of the IMB at HMP Belmarsh. During the reporting year two members took extended sabbaticals, one member left. Five new members were recruited, but one resigned soon after appointment. On 30 June 2016 there were 14 members, two of whom were on sabbatical. Barbara Judge succeeded Geoffrey Penzer as chair of the Board on 1 January 2016. The prison was visited by at least two members every week. The Board met every calendar month, with the Director or one of his senior colleagues in attendance for part of every meeting.
- 5.2 The year's Application Statistics are in Annex 1 below. There were 690 Applications, compared with 372 in the preceding year. The increase is only partially explicable by the prison's expansion from 900 to 1232 prisoners. The IMB believes it reflects dissatisfaction with the operation of the prison's own complaints system, particularly during Autumn 2015 when the section concerned was understaffed, and an ongoing failure to deal convincingly with the issues and problems prisoners face.
- 5.3 About a quarter of Applications concerned issues with prisoners' property and a fifth concerns about aspects of their healthcare. Healthcare Applications diminished in number during the year as the performance of the provider (Oxleas) improved, as it needed to. Property problems persisted. Some related to internal issues within HMP Thameside, which the Director is now trying to address. Many others concerned loss of property in other establishments or on transfer between establishments or from the courts. The issues are well known and affect prisoners throughout the prison estate. Dealing with them absorbs large amounts of staff time. A better, fairer, more cost effective national system is long overdue.
- 5.4 The Board members at Thameside welcomed the publication of the IMB's National Monitoring Framework during the year. The Board has already begun to use a more focused monitoring approach and to avoid drawing conclusions based on anecdotal evidence. It now supplements ad hoc observations with the results of mini projects surveying different aspects of the establishment to provide some standardised evidence from which to draw conclusions about performance in the prison. This is being used in discussions with senior prison staff and will underpin the observations and descriptions in next year's annual report.
- 5.5 The Board has been ably supported throughout the year by its clerk.

Annex 1

IMB Application Statistics

Code	Subject	2012/13 No. (%)	2013/14 No. (%)	2014/15 No. (%)	2015/16 No. (%)	Rank
A	Accommodation	4 (1)	9 (2)	13 (4)	25 (4)	9
B	Adjudications	7 (1)	3 (1)	1 (0)	10 (1)	
C	Equality & Diversity (inc. religion)	6 (1)	4 (1)	4 (1)	8 (1)	
D	Education/employment/ Training (inc. IEP)	13 (3)	24 (6)	31 (8)	38 (6)	8
E 1	Family/visits (inc. mail & phone)	60 (13)	29 (8)	27 (7)	51 (8)	6
E 2	Finance/pay	31 (6)	13 (3)	17 (5)	18 (3)	10
F	Food/kitchen related	5 (1)	3 (1)	9 (2)	5 (1)	
G	Health related	109 (22)	53 (14)	67 (18)	127(18)	1
H 1	Property (within current establishment)	43 (9)	60 (16)	54 (15)	118(17)	2
H 2	Property (during transfer/in another establishment)	38 (8)	26 (7)	47 (13)	52 (8)	5
H 3	Canteen, facilities, Catalogue shopping, Argos	33 (7)	11 (3)	3 (1)	13 (2)	
I	Sentence related (inc. HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-cat etc)	33 (7)	46 (12)	32 (9)	65 (9)	4
J	Staff/prisoner concerns (inc. bullying)	68 (14)	66 (17)	53 (15)	107(16)	3
K	Transfers	15 (3)	12 (3)	0 (0)	5 (1)	
L	Miscellaneous	13 (3)	20 (5)	14 (4)	48 (7)	7
	Total number of IMB applications	478	357	372	690	
	Of total: number of IMB Confidential Access was:	5	10	3	14	

Annex 2

REPORT ON 2014/15

Fairness

Equality and inclusion

Overview

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

Concerns

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

Segregation/care and separation

Overview

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

Concerns

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

Humanity

Healthcare and mental health

Overview

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

Concerns

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

Safer custody

Overview

- 5.11 Surveys of prisoner views by HMIP and MQPL (Monitoring the Quality of Prison Life) suggest that men generally feel safer in HMP Thameside than in most similar local prisons, despite the fact that the frequency of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults is too high.
- 5.12 The prison's safer custody and violence reduction units are effective. ACCT documents are opened when appropriate and procedures are followed carefully. There is a clear violence reduction strategy and prisoner violence reduction representatives perform a useful de-escalating function in some instances. There is a proper level of monitoring oversight by senior managers.

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- 5.13 The prison's work to manage gang members and their potential antagonisms has been particularly praiseworthy and resulted in a Butler Trust Commendation.
- 5.14 Officers use restraint or force on prisoners only when there is no alternative. Sometimes they are necessary in order to put a reluctant individual onto a van to take them to court or another prison. Use-of-force statistics are monitored regularly and carefully to identify any significant trends.
- 5.15 There were no self-inflicted deaths in custody during the reporting year.

Concerns

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

Preparation for release

Education, learning and skills

Overview

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

Concern

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

Purposeful activity

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

Concerns

- The net deficit in the availability of sufficient good quality purposeful activity for all the prisoners who require it, even when the new activity centre is fully operational, is a major issue for the prison.

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- The space in the new activity centre was not commissioned quickly enough for the early groups of pre-release Category C prisoners to benefit.

Resettlement

Overview

- 5.20 The reporting year has seen the start of an intended revolution in the delivery of resettlement services for prisoners approaching their release. Prior to April, when the new arrangements started to operate, good work was being done by Serco's partner, Catch 22, in ensuring that many prisoners had accommodation arranged prior to their release and that there were employment or education opportunities open to them. MTC Novo, the contracted CRC, was unable to pick up all this work immediately, creating hiatus.
- 5.21 A strength of the prison's provision is the way that prisoners who want to keep in touch with their families are helped to do so (as reported last year). This enhances the prospects for successful resettlement. The good work with families has continued and has been recognised in a Butler Trust Commendation.

Concern

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

Residential services

Overview

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

Concerns

- The quality of communication between prisoners and officers about day-to-day matters of proper concern to prisoners is variable. In part this is because of the relatively high proportion of officers who are inexperienced; some officers do not feel they have

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sufficient time to develop good quality communication with prisoners. When such time is not found, prisoners suffer.

- The quality of supervision of the work of prisoner orderlies is variable and sometimes wings and serveries are not as clean as they should be.
- The routine maintenance of furniture and equipment on wings and in cells sometimes appears to be casual, either because problems are not reported promptly or because there are delays in making necessary repairs.