



Annual Report
of the
Independent Monitoring Board
at

HMP Thameside

for reporting Year
July 2018 – June 2019

Published
November 2019



Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introductory sections

Section	Topic	Page
1	Statutory role of the IMB	3
2	Executive summary	4 -5
3	Description of the prison	6

Evidence Sections

4	Safety	7
5	Equality and fairness	8
6	Segregation/care and separation unit	9
7	Accommodation (including communication)	10
8	Healthcare (including mental health and social care)	10
9	Education and other activities	13
10	Work, vocational training and employment	14
11	Resettlement preparation	15

12	The work of the IMB	17
13	Applications to the IMB	18

Sections 1 - 3

1 STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison 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.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HMP Thameside holds a diverse population of remand and convicted prisoners, ranging from young adults to the over-65s. A significant number arrive with behavioural and mental health needs and challenges. Turnover is rapid. The average stay is just five weeks, although many prisoners stay for several years. This presents a multiplicity of challenges, which the prison mostly handles well.

The Independent Monitoring Board welcomes the recovery in the custodial staffing position that was its greatest concern last year, causing prisoners to be too regularly locked in their cells for long periods, and unable to access activities. Ongoing recruitment programmes are now in place to meet staff attrition.

The twin issues of violence and drug use have continued to exert a disproportionately negative impact on the living environment for the vast majority of prisoners who do not cause problems. The number of serious assaults has, however, seen a decline from last year.

Early indications are that Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS)'s new Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model and a more targeted, pro-active approach to violence reduction (challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs) will contribute to efforts to improve the overall prisoner environment.

For the third year running, we report that the plans of HMPPS to make HMP Thameside a reception prison have not been realised. This continued uncertainty inhibits the planning and implementation of improvements in some areas of the prison.

Are prisoners treated fairly?

Previous Board annual reports have highlighted how commonly the application of prison practices and procedures can have unfair impacts on prisoners. Three matters that are highly valued by prisoners illustrate the issue during the reporting year:

Gym availability: levels of cross-deployment of gym staff to other duties have continued to be high, resulting in regular cancellation of activities. This has caused unfairness and frustration, and seems counter-productive, given the mental and physical benefits that prisoners derive from gym and sport (see paragraphs 7.2 and 9.9).

Cell clearance procedures: prisoners regularly complain to the prison and the Board that their property goes missing when they move cells. A check of wing offices and cell clearance records revealed that cell clearance requirements are inconsistently understood by staff, and frequently not followed properly. No improvement had been made several months after the Board brought it to the attention of senior management (see paragraph 7.6).

Visits from family and friends: a two-month Board survey confirmed the validity of complaints that convicted prisoners were frequently unable to book visits, despite no apparent shortage of spaces in the large visits hall. The Board is hopeful that this issue is now being addressed (paragraph 5.9).

On the positive side, there has been some improvement in the handling of complaints, although more needs to be done (see paragraph 5.7). Adjudications and good order or discipline (GOOD) reviews are conducted fairly (see paragraph 6.2).

Are prisoners treated humanely?

HMP Thameside provides a generally unoppressive environment. The equality and diversity team has continued to ensure that prisoner rights, and in particular the rights of those with one or more of the nine protected characteristics, are recognised (see paragraph 5.1).

However, the Board notes that prisoners serving life sentences (including those serving an indeterminate sentence) sometimes share cells with remand prisoners, which we consider inhumane (see paragraph 5.5). No dedicated offender management programmes are available to assist this small number of prisoners to improve their chances of parole, which is unsatisfactory.

The prison holds a significant number of prisoners with severe mental health issues, for whom a prison environment is not always suitable. This is not the fault of the prison and is a national issue. However, it is common for a majority of patients in the prison's inpatient unit to suffer from mental health illness. Some wait weeks or months for a bed in a secure hospital; this is not humane. (See paragraph 8.2)

Are prisoners prepared well for their release?

HMP Thameside provides a range of programmes and initiatives to assist prisoners to prepare for release. The diversity of the prison's population and its rapid turnover make it impossible for these to address every prisoner's individual needs. Reliable data are scant on the extent to which the programmes and initiatives succeed in their aims once a prisoner has left. However, it is clear that many leave ill-prepared for successful community reintegration (see paragraph 11.1)

Board members surveyed prisoners who were due for release within the next three to 10 days about whether they had accommodation and work to go to and had participated in training or educational courses while at HMP Thameside. One hundred and sixteen eligible prisoners responded to this resettlement survey, conducted over four months. The findings are given in the appropriate sections of this annual report (see paragraphs 9.3, 10.1, 11.2 and 11.6).

In summary, 60% of those surveyed said that they had no accommodation on release (see paragraph 11.2). Over 80% said that they had no job to go to (see paragraphs 10.1 and 11.6). It is men in this position, in particular, who Board members regularly see back again in the prison, having reoffended, sometimes within weeks of release.

The chronic lack of affordable accommodation in London suitable for, and available to, prisoners has been cited consistently in the Board's annual reports as an urgent matter to be addressed. It is the most compellingly important factor standing in the way of the successful community reintegration of prisoners released from HMP Thameside (see paragraph 11.2).

Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER AND THE MAYOR OF LONDON

Yet again, we ask for urgent and collaborative action across government and relevant partners to increase the availability of inexpensive and appropriate hostel – not mainstream unaffordable – accommodation for prisoners on their release.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

Yet again, we ask for an end to uncertainty over the prison's future status, so that HMP Thameside can develop its future services to the prison population in line with a settled plan (see paragraph 10.6).

TO THE DIRECTOR

1. We urge that custodial managers take more robust and frequent action when procedures and systems are applied in a manner that clearly results in unfairness to prisoners, such as adherence to cell clearance procedures (see paragraph 7.6) and the quality of responses to complaints (see paragraph 5.7).

2. We ask for a more timely response to the resolution of issues that prevent or hinder the Board in carrying out its statutory duties (see section 1), in particular the Board's unresolved request over many months for access to the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS).

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

- 3.1 HMP Thameside opened in 2012 as a category B local prison, with an operational capacity of 900 men. In 2015, it was expanded to an operational capacity of 1,232, with the new cells intended for local resettlement prisoners (mainly category C) approaching their release date. An industries building was constructed at this time, providing classrooms for resettlement prisoners, and well-equipped workshops to provide work experience and skills in imaging software, print shop, print finishing and textiles.
- 3.2 Throughout 2018/19, the prison has mostly been occupied close to its operational capacity, typically holding two-thirds convicted prisoners and one-third remand. These include some 75–80 young offenders (18–21-year-olds). The prison must accept any prisoners that it is sent, either from a court or another prison. This results in a diverse and fluctuating population with a short average length of stay (five weeks). In April 2019, its reception received 732 prisoners and discharged 630.
- 3.3 The prison was purpose built. All cells have integrated toilets and showers, a telephone and in-cell information technology (IT) for communication within the prison. Using the in-cell technology, prisoners can book their own visits, choose menu options, book healthcare appointments and send messages to departments in the prison. Eligible prisoners can opt to pay for access to a limited number of television channels.
- 3.4 There is a well-equipped gym (including an outdoor sports area for football), a library, an education centre, a multi-faith centre and the industries building, accommodating a range of activities to assist resettlement prisoners. The care and separation unit (CSU) has 18 cells, and a healthcare centre runs surgeries for outpatients and has an 18-cell inpatient unit.
- 3.5 The prison is managed under contract by Serco Group plc. It has two partner agencies, Catch 22 (focusing on offender management, gangs and rehabilitation) and Turning Point (focusing on issues arising from drug and alcohol misuse). A separate division of Serco (Serco FM) provides the facilities management services.
- 3.6 A number of centrally contracted organisations provide other services. Education provision is contracted to Novus; healthcare is contracted to the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust ('Oxleas'); Change Grow Live provides social care; and the community rehabilitation company (CRC) is MTCNovo, which contracts resettlement and housing out to Catch-22, St Mungo and De Paul. The escort contractor is Serco Wincanton.

Evidence sections 4 – 11

4 SAFETY

4.1 Violence has declined slightly in the reporting year to 30 June 2019. Other positive developments include enhanced security measures and a recovery in custodial staffing levels. However, violence and drug use, and the associated issues of bullying and debt, have continued to exercise a negative impact on the lives of many prisoners.

4.2 Violence and drug use

- There were 74 serious assaults (prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff) in the year ending 30 June 2019, against 117 in the year before (prison data). This is a welcome decline, although the overall number remains high.
- A combination of good intelligence and the work of the in-house gangs team largely succeeds in keeping apart prisoners with outside gang membership conflicts.
- Induction of all prisoners through an early days centre is done well, although prisoner feedback suggests that they can move to wings with a limited understanding of ancillary services, such as the Listener service to support those at risk of self-harm.
- HMPPS's CSIPs have replaced the prison's own, largely reactive in-house violence reduction programme. After a gradual introduction of this system, the number of violent prisoners on the more intensive approach of CSIPs is increasing (although expected to remain small in overall number). The Board has observed that the full engagement by relevant staff in CSIP casework is still sometimes lacking.
- There is a small violence reduction team. Prisoner violence reduction representatives on the wings tell the Board that they receive little or no training on how best to fulfil their role.
- Additional measures to prevent drugs, mobile phones and other contraband coming into the prison have included a Rapiscan machine that detects drugs, an increase in the number of sniffer dogs, and more regular searching of all visitors and staff.
- Despite the undoubted deterrent effect of these enhanced measures, Board members see continuing evidence of the availability of drugs on prison wings. Some one in five prisoners subject to a random mandatory drug test tested positive during the year.

4.3 Vulnerable prisoners

- Vulnerable prisoners are selectively housed throughout the prison on appropriate wings.
- The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents opened is lower than last year. It averaged 34 a month in the three months to June 2019, against 49 in the same period in the year before. The reasons are not entirely clear, though may include more attention being given to whether an ACCT is the most appropriate way of identifying and treating the underlying problems of a prisoner.
- The quality of ACCT documentation completion by wing staff remains variable.
- There is a small committed safer custody team. Prisoners sometimes write to the Board with concerns about their safety, and these are always referred to the team. The Board has been impressed by the care and concern for vulnerable prisoners shown at the weekly cross-prison multidisciplinary safeguarding meetings.
- The safer custody team makes commendable efforts to provide social opportunities for those who self-isolate or interact little with other prisoners.

Self-harm

- 4.4 The Board noted a significant increase in the number of reported incidents of self-harm towards the end of the year (59 in June 2019, against an average of 31 over the preceding three months). Repeated self-harming by a limited number of prisoners appears to be part of this picture. The prison needs to review and consider how this worrying issue can be addressed.

Deaths in custody

- 4.5 There were three deaths in custody during the reporting year. An independent investigation into one of these by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) commented critically on the use of restraints on the prisoner during his final days, and the prison's liaison with his family. In their investigation report on another death in custody in the previous year, the PPO concluded that the deceased had not received healthcare provision at HMP Thameside equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community (see paragraph 8.4). Recommendations for improvement were made to the healthcare provider, Oxleas. A recommendation was made to the prison director, to ensure the availability of appropriately trained first-aid staff to provide effective cover.

5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

Diversity and equality

- 5.1 The diversity team continues to be an asset to the prison. Senior managers act as leads for the protected characteristics, and the deputy director chairs quarterly meetings of the diversity and equalities action team. Good efforts are made to involve staff from across the prison and external partners in this work, and to receive feedback from prisoners.
- 5.2 During the first half of 2019, 27 discrimination incident report forms (DIRFs) were submitted (down from 56 for the same period in 2018). Three were upheld, six were not upheld, 10 were deemed not to be DIRFs, and reclassified, and eight remain under investigation. The most common characteristic raised in prisoner DIRFs has concerned racial discrimination complaints against officers.

Faith centre

- 5.3 The multi-faith chaplaincy team plays a key role in supporting the equalities agenda. Despite staffing gaps this year, they have provided committed faith support to all prisoners and religions and overseen the welfare of all foreign national prisoners. Board members have attended services of the main faiths and found them to be positive and relevant. The dietary needs of different religions, and the respecting of religious festivals, have been handled well. The Board continues to be impressed by the positive and calm atmosphere created for prisoners by the chaplaincy team in the busy faith centre.

Foreign nationals

- 5.4 There were 226 foreign nationals (FNs) at the end of June 2019, including 12 IS91 prisoners detained under immigration powers. FN prisoner representatives are located around the prison, and many report positively on the support provided in HMP Thameside. Requests to meet with Home Office immigration enforcement staff are dealt with promptly. The chaplaincy organises regular FN prisoner forum meetings. A community interest company provides confidential and independent advice.

Life-sentenced prisoners

- 5.5 Although HMP Thameside houses some 40 life-sentenced (including indeterminate-sentenced) prisoners, it has no special provision for their needs. Accessing offender behaviour programmes, which might enable them to demonstrate a reduction in their risk, is difficult. This is understood to be a prison categorisation issue, but it is unfair on this small number of men. However, a lifers forum provides these prisoners with a useful opportunity

to share their issues and bring them to the attention of managers. Some lifers share cells with remand prisoners, which the Board considers inhumane.

Disability

5.6 The prison tries to locate prisoners using wheelchairs or with limited mobility on the ground floors, to limit reliance on the lifts, although this is not always possible. The unreliability of lifts throughout the reporting year (see paragraph 7.5) regularly had a negative and unfair impact on prisoners with mobility issues. For example, they are denied access to the education and industries blocks, and the faith centre, when the lifts serving those upstairs facilities break down.

Complaints

5.7 Prisoners submitted 1,816 formal complaints to prison managers in the reporting year. Property has remained the largest single cause for complaint (see paragraph 7.6), followed by residential issues. There has been a welcome improvement in the percentage of complaints responded to on time. This rose from 22% at the start of the year to 84% at year-end. However, interim replies are included in these percentages, a practice that seems questionable and used too frequently.

5.8 The quality of responses seen by Board members has been variable. The criteria for denoting complaints as resolved have also given the Board concern. Responses that tell prisoners waiting to receive their property 'to wait until the property is handed out to you' or that they would receive it 'at the earliest opportunity staff have' are not, in the Board's view, resolved complaints, although they were treated as such. Too often, the handling of complaints gives the impression of a paper exercise, with little evident attention to the Prison Service Instruction (PSI) requirement that 'Prisons must have processes in place to ensure any commitments are followed through, and realistic timetables for this should be given to the complainant'. The Board would particularly like to see the prison's handling of complaints show greater respect for prisoners and their personal property.

Visits

5.9 During the reporting year, the Board became concerned at the increasing number of complaints from convicted prisoners about difficulties in securing a visit slot to see their family and friends. The prison has a large visits hall, which was observed often to have empty spaces. A two-month Board survey of this issue received responses from around half of the prison's convicted prisoners. Forty-two percent said that they had been unable to book a visit in the previous month. The visits team has since introduced changes to the booking system, which include more sessions for convicted prisoners, and opening booking to remand and convicted prisoners at the same time. The Board will continue to monitor this matter.

6 SEGREGATION/CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT

Occupancy

6.1 Over the reporting year, the CSU was occupied to about two-thirds of its capacity of 18 cells, broadly in line with the findings in 2017/18. Board members routinely went into the CSU to speak with the prisoners and staff or attend adjudications. The cells are adequate, and daily opportunities for exercise are provided. The Board has been informed when the special accommodation cell has been used, and this has not been excessive.

Adjudications

- 6.2 Board members who have attended adjudication hearings have invariably reported that they are conducted fairly by prison staff, and that communication with prisoners is good. However, the quality of written evidence varies, and the use of body-worn video camera evidence is rare. A total of 3,214 adjudications were held in the reporting year, of which 55% were proven. A major factor underlying this low percentage was persistent low attendance by reporting officers, which the Board has reported year after year. Significant numbers of hearings are adjourned because of it, and often dismissed when they eventually run out of time. This causes a needless period of uncertainty for the prisoner. The Board has also raised with prison managers the inadequate notice given to the Board to attend GOOD reviews. At the start of the 2019/20 reporting year, a new custodial manager was addressing these seemingly intransigent issues more proactively.
- 6.3 An independent adjudicator hears certain cases, such as alleged finds of drugs or mobile phones, or a prisoner failing a mandatory drug test. Over a three-month period, the Board found that as few as 22% of these hearings resulted in a finding of guilt. Process failures, such as the prison not carrying out a mandatory second drug test, and the difficulty in proving guilt beyond reasonable doubt when both inmates of a cell in which drugs were found deny any offence, contribute to this figure. An unintended consequence can be that prisoners see the penalty for being found with drugs for sale worth the risk, and other prisoners pay the associated price of health damage, bullying and debt.

Healthcare

- 6.4 A nurse visits the CSU every day to administer medications and briefly check on the remainder of the men held there. We have been concerned at the frequent lack of continuity in the nursing staff carrying out these visits, and whether they can adequately monitor the well-being of the men, many of whose mental health is likely to deteriorate when held in isolation. As we reported last year, the CSU invariably contains men displaying acute mental health issues in addition to other challenging behaviours. Several have been vulnerable prisoners on ACCT observation.
- 6.5 Board members have observed that CSU and healthcare staff seem at times to have different perceptions of their working relationships, causing frustration on both sides. A further difficult issue concerns whether the CSU or the prison's healthcare inpatient unit is the better location for an individual prisoner. The dialogue between the prison and the healthcare provider on this particular issue– which we have criticised in the past – has shown some improvement. The regularity with which healthcare staff have failed to meet their obligation to attend GOOD reviews, as required by PSI 1700, or have sent an inadequately briefed member of staff, remains a big concern (see paragraph 8.4).

Social responsibility unit

- 6.6 The Board's last annual report indicated that the prison was keen to establish a new unit outside the CSU to help prisoners demonstrating persistent antisocial behaviour, and who repeatedly move back and forth between the CSU and the wings. A small social responsibility unit has now been created on normal wing location which aims to break this cycle with a psychology-led programme. The Board welcomes this positive initiative, which clearly meets a need.

Regime

7.1 There has been improvement in the overall quality of the regime experienced by prisoners since the Board's last annual report, as a result of a concerted management effort to recruit custodial staff. This has reduced the numbers of prisoners being unable to access activities or being locked for long periods in their cells. The Board welcomes this, and the operator's commitment to ongoing recruitment to keep abreast of custodial staff attrition.

Gym

7.2 More prisoners wish to take up the facilities provided by the gym than any other out of cell activity. It is disappointing that cancellation of gym activities has continued at a high level, mostly due to gym staff cross-deployment (see paragraph 9.9). This deprives many men of the valuable mental and physical benefits they gain from a short release from confinement and inactivity on the wing. In June 2019, there were 13 days when one or more gym sessions were cancelled due to cross-deployment. In the same month, a weekend of competitions – football, tennis and bench press – was also cancelled due to lack of staff.

Offender management

7.3 The integration onto the wings of many newly trained but inexperienced custodial staff has appeared to work well, with each recruit now undertaking a valuable period of shadowing as part of their training. The prison created a dedicated unit, under a senior manager, to oversee the introduction of the OMiC initiative. Key worker sessions have been gradually increasing, aiming to reach the delivery requirement of one per week for every prisoner by September 2019. While it is too early to assess its impact, the Board sees much potential value in this initiative. It will be monitoring the full roll-out and impact of OMiC throughout the next year.

7.4 Board members are often impressed by the knowledge that many custodial staff have of individual prisoners. Most staff-prisoner relationships are observed as positive and appropriate, although there has been a 36% increase this year in applications to the Board about staff bullying and attitudes. A separate wing has been made available for prisoners on the enhanced level of the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme, which is a positive initiative.

Facilities

7.5 HMP Thameside has good-quality modern accommodation compared with that at most prisons. However, key facilities break down regularly, as reported in previous annual reports. This has an adverse – and unfair – impact on prisoners. An interim facilities manager has sought a more systematic and long-term approach to managing facilities failures. However, in the reporting year it has been rare to find a day without a lift being out of action. Disabled prisoners are prevented from attending education classrooms or the faith centre, which are not on ground floors (see paragraph 9.4). Hot food has been ferried by hand up flights of stairs for hundreds of prisoners, which takes staff away from wing duties and imports a health and safety issue. The Board has received many complaints of inoperable in-cell IT systems on which prisoners depend to manage prison life and safety. It has also received reports from prisoners, some of which it has directly substantiated, that not all emergency cell bells work reliably, although prison managers have assured the Board that this is not the case.

Property

7.6 Prisoners rightly complain when their personal property goes missing for no good reason (see paragraph 5.7). A check of how cell clearance is conducted on most wings revealed wide differences in procedure, and a frequent lack of understanding and application of the correct

requirements. A variety of views were held on where completed cell clearance forms were, or should be, kept. It was hard to avoid the conclusion that some staff and managers attach insufficient priority to this task. No improvement was discerned several months after the Board had reported the problem in detail to the director. However, the external transfer of property belonging to prisoners who have moved to other establishments has improved immeasurably this year.

8 HEALTHCARE (including mental health and social care)

The challenge

8.1 The challenge of responding to the scale of demands placed on the prison's healthcare services has remained acute. There can be up to 100 new arrivals each week whose medical condition has to be assessed. On a typical day, half the prison population (600 men) will be prescribed drugs for a range of mental, physical, substance misuse or alcohol-related conditions. Around 10% of the prison population has a diagnosed severe mental illness (bipolar disease, psychosis, schizophrenia), and 20% has diagnosed severe depression. There is a growing number of prisoners in their 60s and 70s.

Mental health

8.2 A small number of prisoners with the most severe mental health conditions are held in the inpatient unit. They account for the majority of patients in the unit. Some return to normal wing location; however, finding suitable places for those needing treatment in a secure mental hospital is becoming harder. In the first eight months of the reporting year, only two men out of 23 who were transferred to such establishments did so within the NHS England target of 14 days from initial assessment. A distressing wait of several months is not uncommon.

8.3 There have been positive developments during the year:

- Nursing staff numbers have increased, and the percentage of new arrivals who undergo health screening is close to 100%.
- The number of prisoner hospital escorts, which we criticised last year, has doubled to four a day. There is now a clearer protocol between Oxleas and Serco on deciding the priorities for hospital transfer.
- Mental health pathways for men on the wing are improving, with the creation of a psychological therapy service and the recruitment of additional psychologists, complementing the existing in-reach and primary mental health care teams.
- Turning Point continues to provide good-quality and responsive support and intervention to men with drug and alcohol substance misuse problems (paragraph 9.9).
- Agreement has been reached to enlarge the pharmacy, although building work has been delayed.
- At a senior level, there is an improved relationship and joint working between Serco and Oxleas.

8.4 In other areas, the Board has serious concerns:

- Large numbers of prisoners still fail to attend booked outpatient appointments. There has been some improvement in attendance at some types of appointment, but this seemingly intractable problem has largely defied better efforts between Oxleas and the prison to overcome it.
- There are continuing and unacceptable delays in the delivery of long-promised screening services such as in-house X-ray and abdominal aortic aneurysm screening for older prisoners.
- The Board has been concerned at the lack of continuity of nursing care in the CSU, and the regular absence of healthcare staff at GOOD reviews (see paragraph 6.5).

- As in previous years, the Board has received a concerning number of complaints about healthcare (106 in the reporting year). Many prisoners complain of a perceived slow response to an initial complaint sent directly to Oxleas. The substance of complaints invariably concerns unexplained delays in treatment, referrals or test results, and non-provision of medication.
- Not all complaints are legitimate, but Board members have observed at first hand failures in healthcare service follow-up to prisoners, and in communication with them.
- An independent investigation report by the PPO into a recent death in custody found that poor communication between healthcare staff led to the deceased not being monitored as safely as he should have been. The report further concluded that the deceased did not receive healthcare provision equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community, and that this was the fourth investigation of a death in custody, out of the previous six at HMP Thameside, in which the PPO had reached the same conclusion.
- The Care Quality Commission issued a Requirement Notice concerning aspects of healthcare provision by Oxleas. A follow-up CQC inspection in May 2019 confirmed several improvements, while calling for improvement in the personalised care planning for patients with diagnosed long-term health conditions.

9 EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Courses

- 9.1 The education provider, Novus, offers a range of courses in mathematics, English (including English for speakers of other languages), and information and communications technology to suit different learning needs and levels. Mentoring, personal and social development, and business courses are offered, as well as creative courses such as art and music technology. Some one-to-one and small group support is available for prisoners who find education classes challenging (for example, due to previous negative experiences), covering life skills and employability.
- 9.2 Success rates were 92% for those who completed their course. Attendance, however, remained disappointingly low. Prison data recorded a 'refused to attend' level of 56% in June 2019. Collaboration between Novus and Serco to tackle this issue has yet to yield results.
- 9.3 Only a third of prisoners who responded to the Board resettlement survey said that they had taken an education course while at HMP Thameside. Novus and Catch 22 have both told the Board that convicted prisoners assessed at entry level in mathematics and English on arrival at the prison are not required to attend basic mathematics and English courses as part of their preparation for release. This seems a lost opportunity.
- 9.4 The unreliability of the lifts (see paragraph 7.5) affected access for several months for mobility-impaired students and education staff, who are based on an upper floor.

Distance learning

- 9.5 Early in the reporting year, the provider mismanaged the enrolment of several prisoners seeking to undertake their second year of distance learning. After a period of improvement, prisoner feedback to the Board indicated new problems with enrolment and ongoing tutor support. Delays were reported in the processing of learners' assignments; there was a lack of communication with prisoners; and inconsistent and, in some cases, incorrect advice was given.
- 9.6 The effective use of the virtual campus has been problematic since the prison opened, owing to technical problems, including a slow internet connection. The Board has been advised that a planned system upgrade will solve these difficulties.

Library

- 9.7 The excellent library has continued to be a credit to the prison. Prisoners can borrow books, browse newspapers, play board games, participate in competitions and suggest books to be stocked. An outreach service is available in the CSU, healthcare centre and the early days centre. The library team has organised a programme of rich and varied events, which have been well attended and appreciated by prisoners. These have included creative writing and art therapy workshops, book clubs, author sessions, film clubs, language courses and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency theory course. Events organised jointly with other parts of the prison have included gym staff assisting with exercise learning, based on the book Cell Workout (see paragraph 9.9).
- 9.8 The Reading Ahead and the Shannon Trust Turning Pages literacy skills programmes have continued to run. Improvements in monitoring and supporting the 13 Shannon Trust mentors have seen a 90% increase in take up.

Gym

- 9.9 Enthusiastic gym staff supervise a comprehensive exercise timetable. The needs of specific groups are catered for, including the over-45s, prisoners needing rehabilitative exercises, and referrals from Turning Point for men with drug and alcohol substance misuse problems (see paragraph 8.3). A daily session is reserved for prisoners on the enhanced level of the IEP scheme. The cancellation of gym activities at short notice (see paragraph 7.2) has often occurred at the weekend. This can be the only time that prisoners who attend education courses or work sessions during the week are able to arrange sessions. They face instead a tedious weekend on the wings.

Other activities

- 9.10 The chaplaincy offers a popular Sycamore Tree restorative justice course, and study groups in specific religions, including Bible studies for Christian prisoners and Islamic studies for Muslim prisoners (see paragraph 5.3).

10 WORK, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

The challenge

- 10.1 A wide range of vocational training and employment opportunities is provided. However, these do not match the challenge presented by the prison's diverse prisoner population (convicted, remand, resettlement) with a multitude of differing needs. The Board resettlement survey recorded that 81% of prisoners said that they had not undertaken any training while in HMP Thameside, and only 17% had work arranged on release.

Prison employment

- 10.2 There are over 800 employment positions within the prison, the majority part time. Some concern the general running of the prison, such as in the laundry, wing cleaning and in the kitchen. Others are trusted positions, including orderlies in the faith centre and healthcare centre, and Insiders in the early days centre. Other prisoners become Listeners or prisoner representatives in areas like violence reduction. These all provide a degree of useful work experience.
- 10.3 The Board has observed that the allocation of work by the labour board is done fairly, with due regard to potential security risks and known enmities. About 100 prisoners each week are allocated work, with priority given to convicted prisoners. At the end of June 2019, about 600 convicted prisoners (approximately 78% of the total convicted population) were employed in some capacity within the prison, and about 180 remand prisoners were employed. The average employment attendance for the end of the reporting year was 79%.

Vocational training

- 10.4 Over 70 prison employment positions can lead to an accredited qualification, including in catering, food hygiene, fitness instruction and the ever-popular barbering. Some employment opportunities include mandatory prior training, such as health and safety, and food hygiene training for wing servery workers.
- 10.5 Courses in CV writing and interview skills, business start-up, money management, personal and social development, and mentoring are offered to help prisoners improve their employability after release. Over 1,200 prisoners attended one or more of the resettlement initiatives arranged by the resettlement team (see paragraph 11.4) during the year, including 114 who completed British Institute of Cleaning Science training.

Uncertainty

- 10.6 The plans of HMPPS to convert HMP Thameside into a reception prison have again not been realised this year. It is intended to provide video-conferencing facilities to serve the courts, which will provide better conditions for many prisoners undertaking their court hearing. Nevertheless, it concerns the Board that these new facilities will displace 40 valuable training opportunities, with accredited qualifications, provided in the industries building (see paragraph 3.1). These opportunities for prisoners to gain skills and work experience in imaging software, textiles, print finishing and print shop have already been withdrawn, ahead of a confirmed start to building works to convert the space to video-conferencing. The Board also understands that there are no firm plans to provide alternative industry learning opportunities of a similar capacity. If the current heterogeneous prisoner make-up remains in the future broadly as it is now, many prisoners will be disadvantaged.

11 RESETTLEMENT PREPARATION

The Challenge

- 11.1 In a typical month, around 250 prisoners are released from HMP Thameside into the community. They have widely differing needs and family circumstances. Some good work is done by the patchwork of contracted-out agencies and a small Serco team to prepare each prisoner for successful resettlement; but this can never meet the task. As Board annual reports have consistently pointed out, the biggest single factor inhibiting successful community reintegration is the chronic absence in London of appropriate accommodation. Employment is also frequently as hard to secure for those who seek it.

Accommodation

- 11.2 Of the 116 prisoners who responded to the Board's resettlement survey, 60% stated that they had no accommodation on release, and 49% that they had not discussed the issue with the CRC. According to information provided by the agency responsible for working with prisoners on housing and related issues (a sub-contract of a sub-contract from the CRC), two-thirds of prisoners had accommodation arranged, either permanent or temporary (such as sofa surfing). While the Board's data differ, both figures reinforce the serious shortage of accommodation supply.
- 11.3 In the Board resettlement survey, several prisoners said that having a bed for the night was their number one concern over employment issues. Many expressed anxiety at leaving the prison. Failure by the CRC to engage early enough, or at all, on accommodation was a general complaint. Most prisoners with no accommodation had no job to go to. Board members regularly see these individuals back in the prison not long after their release.

Family links

- 11.4 A bright spot is the work done by the small Family First team to facilitate and encourage prisoner engagement with their families. Specific visiting sessions for families are arranged,

and projects like Storybook Dads and Treasure Box remain popular. Efforts to reach schools that the children of prisoners attend include a new initiative to invite teaching staff to visit the prison and gain better understanding of how they can support prisoners' children. Over 800 prisoners benefited from the prison's Family First projects during the reporting year.

Outside employment

- 11.5 The prison works diligently to identify external employment opportunities and to arrange training and interviews for prisoners. There was positive feedback from prisoners in the Board's resettlement survey on the help provided in securing employment links. Through the Family First team – which also has a dual role in resettlement – regular job fairs have been arranged for employers willing to take on ex-offenders. These have successfully led to employment at companies like Prêt à Manger and Transport for London. During the reporting year, 148 prisoners were referred to outside community support agencies such as Clean Sheet and the Prince's Trust, which provide employment support for vulnerable individuals, including offenders. Through the work of this team, 63 prisoners joined a training course on release, and 86 secured employment on release, including 51 through Clean Sheet.
- 11.6 Despite these successes, Jobcentre Plus reported in 2018 that 60% of the prisoners they saw from HMP Thameside considered themselves to be unfit for work and intended to claim Employment and Support Allowance. In the Board resettlement survey, only 17% said that they had work arranged on their release. Sixty two percent said that they had contacts or other job leads.

Home detention curfew (HDC)

- 11.7 There has been a noticeable reduction in the number of complaints received by the Board about the handling of HDC. This followed a change in responsibility and a new contractor. Delays in processing HDC are now generally outside the control of the prison.

12 The work of the IMB

The Board is welcomed in all areas of the prison and is grateful to staff, who invariably give their time willingly to assist Board members. There have been occasions during the year when the Board has experienced frustrating difficulties in gaining access to prison systems such as NOMIS – an issue yet to be resolved.

Each week, a visit is conducted by one Board member, whose report goes to the director for comments. A second member deals with prisoner applications. Most visits are made during the working week, but occasionally take place at weekends. Board members with areas of special interest also attend relevant prison meetings. A clerk supports the Board for half the week.

The Board meets monthly. It is attended by the director or his deputy, or by a head from across the prison, to provide updates and answer questions. Members monitor adjudications and GOOD reviews when available, incidents at height and other times when the command suite is opened.

Each year, Board members hold a training day, which this year concentrated on ways to make rota visits and reporting more focused and effective. The Board speaks to each batch of custodial officers during their training, to explain the role of the Board in the prison. During the year, the Board published a revised information leaflet for prisoners on the role of the Board. This is now given out at induction to new prisoners.

Members visited two other prisons – HMP Isis and HMP Wormwood Scrubs. One member attended the New Members course and another the Board Leaders course. The Board was represented at the IMB annual conference, and the Chair regularly attends the London IMB Chairs meetings. The Chair met with the PPO when she visited the prison.

The Board remains below complement, with nine active members at reporting year end, two on probation. During the year, three members left and four took a sabbatical, with one returning during the year. The Board ran a recruitment campaign in May/June 2019, resulting in three candidates recommended for appointment and awaiting ministerial confirmation.

BOARD STATISTICS	
Recommended complement of Board members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	15
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	12
Total number of visits to the establishment	464
Total number of segregation reviews attended	N/A

13 Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	19	27
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	9	5
C	Equality	10	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	27	28
E 1	Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions	21	29
E 2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	11	11
F	Food and kitchens	5	5
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	106	104
H 1	Property within this establishment	67	86
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	61	54
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	11	12
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, recategorisation	31	52
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying and staff attitudes	144	106
K	Transfers	1	6
	Miscellaneous and repeat	14 + 4	72
	Total number of IMB applications	541	598