



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross

**For reporting year  
1 May 2019 – 30 April 2020**

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# Contents

<b>Introductory sections 1–3</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Statutory role of the IMB	3
2. Description of the establishment	4
3. Executive summary	5–10
<b>Evidence sections 4–7</b>	
4. Safety	11–14
5. Fair and humane treatment	15–18
6. Health and wellbeing	19-21
7. Progression and resettlement	22 - 26
<b>The work of the IMB</b>	27
<b>Applications to the IMB</b>	27–28

## **Introductory 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 is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- 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
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- 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.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that States designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## **2. Description of the establishment**

2.1 HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is situated on the outskirts of South Warrington, in Appleton Thorn. It opened as a category D open prison for juvenile and young prisoners in 1985, on the site of a Royal Fleet Air Arm base, HMS Blackcap. In 2008 it became an establishment for 18–25-year-olds, and in 2013 the age limit was removed and it now takes any prisoner over 18 years of age.

2.2 The operational capacity is 385, housed in seven units for category D prisoners nearing the end of their sentence; this also includes lifers and prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection (IPP) who are nearing parole. The objective is successful rehabilitation into the community, and therefore reducing reoffending.

2.3 Should segregation be required, there are four cells allocated on unit 6, where prisoners await transfer back to closed conditions. The aim is for immediate transfer within four hours. The remainder of the unit is utilised for prisoners new to open conditions, for induction prior to transfer to one of the remaining six units.

2.4 The establishment has several workshops on site, with opportunities for training and rehabilitation into a working life in the community. Outside agencies operate some of the workshops (Timpson, Max Spielmann, Remade with Hope) and have, on occasion, also created job opportunities for prisoners on release. The gym is the focus for leisure activities, and the farms and gardens workshop keeps the site attractive, tidy and colourful.

2.5 The educational element is provided by Novus, part of The Manchester College. Courses provided include numeracy and literacy, as well as lifestyle courses.

2.6 Healthcare services, commissioned by NHS England, are provided by Bridgewater Community Healthcare Foundation Trust (primary care services) and Greater Manchester West Mental Health Care Foundation Trust (mental healthcare services).

2.7 Transport is provided by GEOAmev for transfers between establishments, and is supplemented by the use of the prison's own vehicles to transport prisoners to work placements, thus reducing travel costs.

### **3. Executive summary**

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

3.1.1. This report was mainly compiled while in 'lockdown' during the COVID-19 emergency. All members of the Thorn Cross community are to be congratulated for the manner in which they responded to the changes in regime. The Governor and his team took decisive action to safeguard prisoners and staff.

3.1.2. The Board feels that Thorn Cross continues to be a high-performing prison, providing a positive and purposeful rehabilitative culture where prisoners feel safe and are known by the staff.

3.1.3. The Governor had been in post for just two months at the start of the reporting year. He has a clear view of what he wants to achieve and is adept at explaining his vision both to staff and prisoners.

3.1.4. Two experienced Board members left during the reporting year, with our Chair becoming ill soon after the start of the year and sadly dying in October. The Board has regrouped, with the recruitment of two new members (one of whom has started her induction) and with two members dual boarding. We have looked again at our practices, particularly in relation to what constitutes an application.

3.1.5. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of applications we receive, partly because of the reasons referred to above. However, the fall in the number of applications has to be seen in the context of a halving of the number of complaints received by the prison in the second half of our reporting year.

## **3.2 Main judgements**

### **How safe is the prison?**

Thorn Cross is a very safe establishment. Incidents of violence and bullying are extremely rare. The prisoners are generally able to handle their emotions well and there are a number of support services available. Safeguarding is fit for purpose.

### **How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?**

Staff treat the prisoners with courtesy and respect. The prisoners see the staff as approachable and helpful. The estate is conducive to a fair and humane regime. The accommodation is generally of a good standard.

### **How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?**

Healthcare needs are assessed and the on-site team is able to manage most healthcare needs on site with, for example, general practitioner (GP) and dentist visits. Waiting times for treatment reflect those in the community. There is a dedicated mental health service.

### **How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?**

The prison has a positive and purposeful rehabilitative culture. There is good communication between the different partners involved. Relationships between the prisoners themselves and between staff and prisoners are generally positive. Provision is bespoke, with the prisoners known as individuals.

### **3.3 Main areas for development**

#### ***TO THE MINISTER***

3.3.1. As we reported last year, there is a need to consider the use of mobile phones by prisoners, albeit under strictly controlled conditions. Last year, we called for some 'blue sky' thinking on the matter. The answer was a firm 'no', without seemingly even considering the needs of prisoners in the open estate. The outbreak of COVID-19 towards the end of the reporting year has meant that some use of mobile phones is now to be permitted. Hopefully, this will prove to be a success and will be something that can continue post COVID-19.

3.3.2. As we highlighted last year, the relatively high cost of telephone calls remains an issue. This has an impact on prisoners' ability to maintain contact with their families.

#### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

3.3.3. The state of the building that houses the offender management unit (OMU) is unsatisfactory. This is not new, and although action to secure a replacement has begun, it is by no means certain that a replacement will be found. It should be a high priority.

3.3.4. Following the sudden removal of chairs throughout the prison, replacement ones have now arrived. They are totally unsuitable. They look unattractive, easily tip up when you sit on the edge, and are uncomfortable. Prisoners have refused to use them, leaving many without a chair in their rooms. We are not convinced that a more suitable chair, at a reasonable cost, that meets fire standards, cannot be found.

3.3.5. The fire alarm system does not meet current standards. The residential units have now had adaptations to an external door, which can be opened by the prisoners in an emergency, allowing their exit. The installation of a new system, including smoke alarms in each room, has been dragging on for some time; however, although planning meetings and site surveys are carried out, nothing actually seems to be happening. A date for completion of the work should be set within the next year.

3.3.6. Over the year, a number of concerns have been raised by the Governor and officers regarding the assessment and transfer process from closed establishments to Thorn Cross. On transfer, a number of prisoners have tested positive for drugs on reception at the establishment, when they should have been drug free during their assessment period. This puts extra demand on existing resources dealing with rehabilitation, security and withdrawal within Thorn Cross.

3.3.7. An additional concern is the healthcare needs of prisoners who transfer to Thorn Cross while in the process of hospital and other clinical treatment at their current establishment. These prisoners, who require ongoing treatment at specialist centres, cannot easily or quickly be referred to local medical facilities. To enable these prisoners to continue their treatment, significant additional resource requirements are created in terms of escorts and transport from Thorn Cross. Several requests for a 'medical hold' process, to allow a deferment until treatment is completed, have been made but none have been approved.

3.3.8. Prisoners' belongings continue to go astray when they are being transferred from one establishment to another. The retrieval of property takes up too much time, and too much appears to be left to the discretion of the van driver. This is accompanied by an apparent intransigence on behalf of GeoAmey to play their part in rectifying the issue.

### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

3.3.9. There have been 20 absconds during the reporting year. The prison responded by holding focus groups with prisoners and undertaking an analysis of those who had absconded, in an attempt to identify any shared underlying characteristics. The result of this work is that, on entry to Thorn Cross, some are identified for discrete monitoring to try to 'nip in the bud' matters that might lead to abscond. This initiative needs to be fully evaluated to see if it has been successful.

3.3.10. The drive to increase the number of prisoners working in the community is laudable and one we support. However, care needs to be taken that this is done in a timely manner that does not raise expectations among prisoners and does not place an undue burden on staff.

### 3.4 Progress since the last report

Item from last year's report	Progress
Prison high performing	Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MPQL) and Staff Quality of Life (SQL) surveys show continued improvement and that Thorn Cross is performing better than other similar establishments.
Availability of steroids and the role the gym has to play in reducing their use	Introduction of more cardiovascular training to replace weights; introduction of 'parkruns'; reintroduction of sports field use.  Revised drug strategy aimed at disrupting supply and supporting recovery.
Telephone charges and use of mobile phones	COVID-19 has brought a temporary halt to the increase in the use of in-cell telephony (although it was not clear whether Thorn Cross was to be included in this). The response from the minister was a categorical 'no' to even considering the use of mobile phones and to engaging with the 'blue-sky' thinking we proposed. We considered this to be a very short-sighted response and note that COVID-19 has meant that mobile phones can now be used.
Education and training budget and loss of popular courses	The courses lost have not been reintroduced and there is little prospect that they will be. Current courses on offer are geared towards supporting the prisoners to gain employment on release, if not before through release on temporary licence (ROTL).
Poor state of OMU building	No progress, aside from trying to arrange for ground surveys to be carried out.

Removal of furniture due to fire risk	Work continues to find suitable replacements.
Increasing number of work placements in the community	The aim is to increase the number of placements to 120, from the current number of 60–70.
Contraband entering the prison	This continues to be an issue. The introduction of a mobile phone designated area may help reduce this. Night staffing is under review.
Needs of lifers and IPP prisoners	There is a dedicated IPP/lifer lead who works with the designated lead from probation.
Missing property	Problems persist.

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1. There are prisoners arriving most weeks, although since the start of the pandemic the number of new arrivals has been lower. During this time, in order to safeguard staff and prisoners, reception has been operating under enhanced conditions. Each new cohort is met by prison staff and peer mentors, who quickly get the prisoners settled into unit 6, the induction unit, where they spend up to 14 days, before being allocated a more permanent place on another unit. During the COVID-19 outbreak, new cohorts (known as a 'reverse cohort') have been spending 14 days in unit 6, which has become the isolation unit as well as the induction unit. All of the prisoners arriving are given a list of standard operating procedures. However, having come from another prison, where they will have served most of their sentence, they are invariably already accustomed to prison life.

4.1.2. The new arrivals follow a structured induction programme, so that they become familiar with the regime at Thorn Cross and know what is expected from them. During the reporting year, the induction process was under review. As an interim measure, the Board, Shelter, Listeners, mentors and partner agencies all give a 10-minute informational presentation about the establishment and what it can offer. This has been with a view to implementing a new-style induction process. Some of the induction programme is delivered by the prisoners themselves. There is a place for this, but the quality of what is delivered is variable, to say the least, and the way it is organised is not always conducive to getting the information required – for example, getting the prisoners to fill out forms when no account is taken of their literacy needs, or the person leading the session merely reading out from a prepared sheet. Changes are to be made to this process, but at the time of writing we have been unable to see the new cohorts owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Wherever possible, prisoners are being given various leaflets regarding the services and support available at Thorn Cross, such as the chaplaincy and Change Grow Live (CGL).

4.1.3. Within their first few days at the establishment, the prisoners will be seen by healthcare staff, their offender supervisor and education staff, to ensure that all their needs can be assessed. Their records from their previous prison are used as a starting point.

#### 4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1. Very few prisoners have suicidal thoughts while at Thorn Cross, and the prisoners generally handle their emotions well.

Period	May 2018 – April 2019	May 2019 – April 2020
No. of self-inflicted deaths	0	0

No. of self-harm incidents	0	0
No. of deaths in custody	0	1
No. of ACCTs opened	6	4

4.2.2. There was a death in custody during the reporting year. The inquest has not yet been held. The staff were extremely supportive of the individual's family and friends. A service of remembrance was held in the chapel, which was well attended by staff and prisoners alike.

4.2.3. The number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents opened is extremely low. When they *are* actioned, they are managed correctly. There is an adequate number of trained assessors, and the names of those on duty are displayed at the gate.

4.2.4. The establishment has various support agencies, such as Listeners, mentors and a direct telephone line to the Samaritans, all of which can be used by prisoners for support and advice.

### 4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1. During the reporting year, there were only three incidents of a violent act by a prisoner against officers, the first for three years (two staff were assaulted in one of the incidents). The prisoner responsible was quickly returned to closed conditions and the staff were supported by their colleagues and the senior staff of the prison. Prisoner-on-prisoner violence is also extremely rare, with only three reported incidents. The staff are adept at using de-escalation techniques where necessary. It remains to be seen if the increase in the number of violent incidents over this past year is the start of a trend.

Period	May 2018 – April 2019	May 2019 – April 2020
No. of incidents of bullying	0	0
No. self-isolating for own protection	0	0
No. of assaults on prisoners	0	3
No. of assaults on staff	0	3

4.3.2. The prisoners feel safe, and most pass through Thorn Cross with few, if any, concerns. While it is known that some prisoners have associations with organised crime gangs outside the prison, a gang culture simply does not exist. Over 70% of the prisoners believe that bullying is not tolerated.

4.3.3. Serious incidents are rare but the prison does undertake regular simulation exercises, which are observed by the Board. They are always carried out in a workmanlike manner, and the learning from them is put into practice.

#### **4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding**

4.4.1. The prison identifies vulnerable prisoners on arrival. Some are accommodated on unit 3, the wellbeing unit, where there are additional Listeners. When allocating new vulnerable prisoners to a unit, care is taken to allocate the best possible room, not necessarily the first room to become available.

4.4.2. Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose.

#### **4.5 Use of force**

4.5.1. During the reporting year, force was used on 34 occasions, with 30 of these being the use of handcuffs to prevent abscond while escorting a prisoner. The remaining four cases occurred as a result of non-compliance by a prisoner.

4.5.2. In this reporting year, there has been one serious incident, where a newly arrived prisoner caused a considerable amount of damage while vandalising a cell. As he had not been in the prison long, it does raise the question of why the prisoner was ever given category D status in the first place. Most of the incident was observed by a Board member. The steps taken were appropriate, and staff involved were debriefed afterwards.

#### **4.6 Substance misuse**

4.6.1. Through a combination of staff and peer mentors, CGL assists a number of prisoners with their addiction problems. There is a drop-in facility as well as arranged appointments.

4.6.2. The drugs of choice continue to be cannabis (23 positive results ), cocaine and alcohol. Regular mandatory drug tests are carried out.

<b>MDT</b>	<b>Number of tests</b>	<b>Number of failed</b>	<b>% fail rate</b>
Random test	419	30	7.1
Suspicion tests	37	9	24.3
Risk tests	36	3	8.3
Test totals	492	42	8.5

With Thorn Cross being a category D prison, the large number of unauthorised 'drop-offs' is a worrying and ongoing problem. Extra patrols are being carried out during the night, by staff and the police alike. The local community has been approached for ideas on combating the problem.

4.6.3. A frequent testing programme for class A drugs was introduced at the start of 2020, with five prisoners being placed on it. Since then, 12 tests have been conducted and all returned negative. This is a positive outcome for the programme.

4.6.4. The perception of the prisoners (as shown in the MPQL survey carried out in July 2019) is that drugs do not cause significant problems at Thorn Cross and that,

although drugs are taken, this is not to a very high level. Our own observations would support that view.

4.6.5. There are a number of courses for substance misuse on offer to help prisoners with their addictions. One such course trains them to recognise the symptoms of drug overdoses and what action to take when released from prison.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

5.1.1. Nearly all of the rooms are for single occupancy. Unit 7 has 33 rooms which are double occupancy, but these are of a good size, with the prisoners given large-screen televisions. However, the double occupancy rooms on unit 6 are very small, and indeed are only just within the limits laid down for room size. Fortunately, prisoners spend very little time on this induction unit before being moved to another unit. All of the buildings are well maintained.

5.1.2. Each unit has been able to develop its own identity, whether through decorating, paintings, posters or through purpose. For example, unit 7 is the family unit where the men living on that unit can have extra contact with their families, unit 6 the induction unit, and unit 1 is where many of the prisoners on external work-outs reside. Unit 3 is the wellbeing unit, where many of the residents are vulnerable, living with an illness, or older. It is a very peaceful unit, with a quiet room with subdued lighting and fish tanks.

5.1.3. Each unit has a number of dedicated cleaners, and our regular rota visits find the units clean, with adequate showering and washing facilities. The prisoners are able to access these at any time of day. The areas around the units are usually kept clean and tidy, although there are sometimes instances of smoking near the external doors, which are not designated as smoking areas around the site. Sometimes ashtrays have been placed near the door, to stop prisoners throwing cigarette ends on the floor. These mixed messages do not help, and the policing of smoking areas needs to be more assertive.

5.1.4. There are laundry facilities available, but the repair of these has not been satisfactory. After many weeks, if not months, of machines lying idle, a new contract has been agreed with a new provider. This has resulted in new machines and a more proactive repair and maintenance provision. This was achieved in spite of the prison procurement bureaucracy, not because of it.

5.1.5. Each unit has communal areas where there are recreational and dining facilities. The servery is staffed by prisoners under staff supervision. This ties up a number of officers, as the dining facilities are replicated across the units. It may be beneficial to carry out a feasibility study to establish whether a central dining room would be a better utilisation of staff resources.

5.1.6. The kitchen provides three meals a day, which are put onto trolleys that are then taken to each unit. The prisoners taking the trolleys are required to wear protective footwear, but this does not always happen. There needs to be consistency here in adhering to health and safety rules.

5.1.7. We sometimes hear the prisoners complaining about the size of the meals, but the ones we have seen appear adequate. Only six complaints were received during the reporting year. There are always a number of choices available, and all dietary, religious and cultural needs are catered for. The prisoners are consulted about what should and should not be included on the menus. Prisoners who arrive from work after mealtimes are still provided with a hot meal.

5.1.8. There is a small kitchen area on each of the four corridors on a unit. Here, the prisoners can prepare their own meals, using items they have bought in their weekly canteen. Some of these kitchen areas would benefit from extra shelving, but they are still kept clean and tidy by the residents.

5.1.9. At Thorn Cross, the prisoners wear their own clothes. Where specialist equipment *is* needed, it is provided – for example, ‘whites’ in the kitchen and staff mess.

## **5.2 Segregation, special accommodation**

5.2.1. As an open prison, Thorn Cross does not have a traditional segregation unit. There are three rooms at one end of unit 6, separated by a locked door. These rooms are the most cell-like rooms that the prison has. Prisoners may be placed there following a decision from an adjudication hearing to return the prisoner to the closed estate. They are sparsely furnished and it is rare for any prisoner to spend more than a few hours there. One of these cells now has a sofa and coffee table, and is used as a quiet room for staff to talk to prisoners, particularly those who are thought to be considering absconding.

5.2.2. As returns to a closed prison are swift, it is not always possible for a Board member to speak to the prisoner before transfer. The prison always contacts us in a timely manner but, invariably, the prisoners have left by the time we arrive. During the COVID-19 restrictions, such prisoners were given the option of speaking to a Board member by telephone. When we have been able to speak to someone in segregation, they have commented that they feel they have been treated fairly and have understood what is happening to them, and why.

## **5.3 Staff–prisoner/detainee relationships, key workers**

5.3.1. We have always observed the relationships between staff and prisoners and between prisoners to be very good. The difficulties that some prisons have with conflict between rival groups is not an issue at Thorn Cross. There is a generally stable prison population, alongside a stable staffing complement. The prison has achieved a good balance in projecting a calm and relaxed atmosphere, which is also purposeful. The prisoners are trusted to conduct themselves responsibly and they respond to that. They are also supportive of each other. They are encouraged to respect all those they come into contact with.

5.3.2. Staff use their interactions with the prisoners to get them to think about their actions and to take responsibility for themselves. Officers do not jump in and solve prisoners' problems for them; they support the prisoners in resolving things for themselves.

5.3.3. Prisoners feel that they are generally able to approach staff and resolve matters face to face. This helps explain the fall in both the number of applications to the Board and the number of complaints submitted. The MPQL survey last year found that over 70% of the prisoners agreed that the best way to get things done is to be polite and to go through the proper channels.

## **5.4 Equality and diversity**

5.4.1. The diversity and equality action team is led by the Deputy Governor, supported by an equalities officer, and meets bi-monthly to report on performance data, which is provided following the recommendations of the Lammy Report. Members of the team have their photographs displayed throughout the prison. There is an identified lead for each of the protected characteristics, as well as for former veterans and prisoners from a Gypsy/Romany/Traveller background. There are events to mark different religious festivals such as Ramadan, Black History Month, LGBT+ History Month and Holocaust Remembrance Day. These events help raise awareness and foster understanding and acceptance between different groups.

5.4.2. Some adaptations have been made on one of the residential units to cater for wheelchair users.

5.4.3. It continues to be the case that the majority of the prisoners are white. Last year's MPQL survey found that black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners considered that they were treated differently to their white counterparts. They felt that they were viewed 'more suspiciously' and were more likely to be challenged when they were sitting in groups.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

5.5.1. There are several faiths represented in the prison population. The chaplaincy arranges a number of festivals and celebrations to reflect this, in partnership with various organisations and individuals. The kitchen provides meals that ensure that the religious needs of the prisoners are met.

## **5.6 Incentives and earned privileges**

5.6.1. A new incentives policy was adopted in January 2020 and is subject to annual review. Its purpose is to incentivise the prisoners to conform to the prison regime, with the belief that positive reinforcement is more effective in changing someone's behaviour than punishing them. The prisoners can gain access to higher levels of personal cash, higher pay, more visits, games consoles, additional gym sessions and additional items from the facilities list.

5.6.2. There are three levels: basic, standard and enhanced. Movement up the levels is achieved by review, and all new prisoners are reviewed after three months. An

adjudication can trigger a review. Staff frequently use verbal praise and positive body language to reward good behaviour.

5.6.3. Ninety-five per cent of the prisoners are on the enhanced level, with the remainder on standard. Among the black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, 90% are on enhanced, with 10% on standard. Careful monitoring of these figures should continue, with care taken to try to establish the reasons for this difference among the black, Asian and minority ethnic population. On average, around seven warnings are issued each month, with 10 reviews taking place.

5.6.4. Sometimes poor behaviour results in the loss of privileges. However, some sanctions are not available in the open estate – for example, the loss of television (the prisoners can just go to the next room) and loss of gym (meaningless for prisoners who do not use it). Some thought should be given to developing alternative sanctions suited to the open estate.

## **5.7 Complaints**

5.7.1. There were just over 300 complaints submitted during the reporting year, with nearly one-third being in the offender assessment system (OASys)/offender management category. A dedicated staff member coordinates the complaints system and proactively chases up late responses, including those to other establishments. The number of complaints received each month does fluctuate, but the trend during the second half of the year was clearly downward. The second half of the year saw a 50% reduction in the number of complaints submitted. We monitor the complaints received and the speed at which they are replied to, and are satisfied that they are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

## **5.8 Property**

5.8.1. There has been a fall in the number of applications to us about property. However, missing property during transfer is something that the prisoners tell us is a continuing concern, and thus is one that they submit complaints about. There have been instances where there has been plenty of room on the van to take all the property that the prisoners have, but the van driver has refused. It has to be remembered that many of the prisoners transferring to Thorn Cross have been in prison for many years and have accumulated many items.

5.8.2. Staff do all that they can to recover the missing items, which sometimes are of great sentimental value, such as photographs and letters.

## **6 Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare: general**

6.1.1. The quality of healthcare provision is good, as evidenced by the very small number of complaints (two in total) and the positive responses from prisoners. Healthcare services are commissioned by NHS England and were provided for most of the year by Bridgewater Community Healthcare Foundation Trust for the primary care services and Greater Manchester West Mental Health Care Foundation Trust for mental healthcare services. There are no inpatient facilities in the prison, so prisoners requiring hospitalisation are cared for at the local or specialist hospital.

6.1.2. A local delivery board meets every three months to assess and evaluate provision, with representatives from all health sectors, including public health in Warrington. Health issues are also raised at associated meetings, including prisoner representative forums. Healthcare staff are always involved in serious incidents, hostage situations and segregation reviews. They are closely involved in assessing prisoners for cell sharing, as well as fit-for-work notices. The mentors in the CGL services attend the induction programme for new prisoners and offer a drop-in service for individuals who may be experiencing difficulties.

6.1.3. The healthcare facility utilises the SystemOne computer system, which enables electronic transfer of medical records across establishments, and full use has been made of the electronic prescribing element of the system. There have been issues raised about 'medical hold', regarding the transfer of prisoners with ongoing medical needs. Such transfers strain the existing capacity of the prison both to provide escorts and pay for transport to non-local medical facilities.

### **6.2 Primary healthcare**

6.2.1. Staff working at Bridgewater Community Healthcare Foundation Trust have been informed of their imminent transfer to the NHS and no issues have been identified to date. Staff sickness issues, which were having an impact on prisoner care, have been resolved and staffing is now at full capacity. A request has been made for a social care assistant post in addition to the existing staff.

6.2.2. Levels of non-attendance at healthcare appointments have dropped significantly over the year (for example, there were only 20 missed appointments out of 170 in December 2019). However, 105 nurse appointments were missed in the same period. New shift patterns, which take account of prisoners on ROTL, will need to be implemented to solve this. New equipment is being installed in the dental suite, and waiting times have been reduced, with only 10 missed appointments up to December.

6.2.3. All routine specialist clinics, health promotion and screening programmes have continued over the year, although there has been a lower take-up of vaccinations and immunisations. The CGL services have organised a non-smoking campaign and tobacco is no longer provided as part of the induction packs given to new prisoners.

6.2.4. The CGL service supports the rehabilitation of those with substance and alcohol misuse problems, and works with the service in the community to ensure

continuity of care on release. In December, CGL had a caseload of 197, which included 176 active cases, with 38 new assessments carried out in November. The MPQL survey carried out in July 2019 showed that 47% of prisoners believed that Thorn Cross is good at improving the wellbeing of those with drug problems.

6.2.5. The Quality Framework submission for patient safety, quality and performance was graded positively and there is ongoing research into avoidable harm as an outcome of this report. Medicines management is good, with a very positive controlled drugs audit over the reporting year, and a very low prescribing rate by the GPs in the prison. The MPQL survey showed that over 54% of prisoners believe that unit staff take an interest in helping to sort out healthcare needs, and 84% that they are looked after on arrival in the prison.

### **6.3 Mental healthcare**

6.3.1. A new mental health nurse has been appointed, with an additional part-time therapist based in the prison, supplementing the shared resource at HMP Risley. Group therapy sessions started in January, along with staff training on mental health issues and a promotional campaign to raise awareness of provision. Only 14 prisoners were in need of secondary mental health treatment in December. Generally, the care and support for those at risk of self-harm, suicide or bullying is rated highly by staff and prisoners alike.

6.3.2. The MPQL survey raised concerns from prisoners about the level of mental healthcare in the prison and there was a slight increase in the number of prisoners admitting to suicidal thoughts while at Thorn Cross. In particular, respondents felt that additional support or counselling should be provided to help those prisoners struggling to adjust to the open regime. Low-level anxiety around release was also identified by the survey as a concern. The prison is developing a new multi-agency approach to alleviate this, although it is too early to assess the impact of this initiative.

### **6.4 Social care**

6.4.1. Three prisoners have received support from occupational therapy and have had aids such as shower chairs provided. There are good links with the local authority, which can be approached for care package assessments if necessary.

### **6.5 Exercise, time out of cell**

6.5.1. The regime at Thorn Cross enables significant time out of cell for all prisoners, including new prisoners, who have their own exercise area. In order to reduce the use of steroids, the gym has replaced a large amount of weight-lifting equipment with cardiovascular machines. The gym staff provide customised assessments for prisoners and advise on health and diet. In addition, they are also taking part in a literacy programme, to encourage prisoners to read to their children and improve their own literacy skills in a non-educational environment.

6.5.2. Prisoners also have access to a large sports field, to undertake activities such as running and jogging, and a recently introduced 'parkrun' session has been well received and well supported by prisoners.

## **6.6 Drug rehabilitation**

6.6.1. CGL offers structured treatment, enhanced brief interventions and recovery support. This is offered as soon as prisoners enter the establishment, via an induction package. A therapeutic testing service is also available to prisoners who are in the service and wish to sign up for it. Its purpose is to support them to stay substance free. The good relationship between the CGL team and healthcare staff helps ensure that those prisoners who require clinical intervention have their needs met. This has continued during the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as the provision of assessment packs, one-to-one support and release planning.

6.6.2. A new drugs strategy was implemented in February 2020 to focus on dealers and users. It has not been possible to monitor the impact of this as yet. Plans are also in place to establish a drug-free unit, with the added incentive of work placements and ROTL.

6.6.3. The substances of choice are cannabis, cocaine and alcohol. Over the reporting year, concern has been raised by prison staff with regard to their ability to identify drug use in those prisoners transferring from other prisons. Efforts to develop a pre-testing regime with other prisons have not yet been successful, and have resulted in an increase in dip-testing on reception. The prison also needs more resources to test those prisoners leaving and returning from ROTL and work placements.

## **6.7 Soft skills**

6.7.1. The prison is looking at ways to include wellbeing as part of its revised induction programme, and has a new worker in post for this purpose. A lot of work has taken place with older prisoners on unit 2. 'Time to Change' in Warrington has appointed a coordinator to support prison staff and inmates, with sessions on wellbeing and access to support groups in the community.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

7.1.1. There is a well-stocked library, which is open for 19.4 hours each week. There are DVDs, CDs, books and magazines available for loan. Eighty-four per cent of the prison population uses the library regularly, and those who do not are proactively contacted to see what would encourage them to use the facility.

7.1.2. The education provision continues to be provided by Novus, and participation rates remain high. There are 20 staff overall, a mix of full-time, part-time and sessional workers. The education area has recently been redecorated, resulting in a much brighter learning environment. Facilities are good, although the loss of the catering room, caused by falling tiles, has been a blow. The length of time it is taking to carry out the repairs is a concern.

7.1.3. Screening of new arrivals is now more rigorous, so that both the previous learning undertaken and the English and mathematics levels are identified. A new functional skills entry class supports those learners below level 1, and this is linked to the library and the Shannon Trust provision. The acquisition of functional skills is now included in sentence plans.

7.1.4. The following courses are currently offered (numbers in brackets): art and design (45), information technology user skills (51), certificate in applied entrepreneurship/business (38), award in mentoring (7), functional skills in English (87) and functional skills in mathematics (101). Support for prisoners undertaking individual study is provided through the use of the 'higher learning room' and the virtual campus.

7.1.5. During the COVID-19 pandemic, where practicable, educational resource packs were provided for prisoners enrolled on specific courses, as well as general learning packs suitable for all prisoners.

### **7.2 Vocational training, work**

7.2.1. The following courses are offered, with the number of places shown in brackets: national vocational qualification (NVQ) diploma in professional cookery (16), NVQ diploma in food production and cooking (21), diploma in plastering (combined with a dry lining course) (32), diploma in painting and decorating (29), diploma in dry lining (6) and diploma in bricklaying (31). Following feedback from employers and using local market employment information, a range of new courses and support packages has been added, including: a pre-ROTL or release construction course, 1-1 self-employment coaching sessions, a shorter painting and decorating course (which is more employment focused), a customer service course, a hospitality course, opportunities to assess people on ROTL and accredit their work there, and a new range of mentoring courses.

7.2.2. There are many work opportunities provided in the prison, and around 60–70 prisoners have jobs in the community. The Governor has an ambitious plan to increase this number to 120 over time. Currently, along with prison drivers and cleaners, work is available in the following areas:

- **Recycling Lives**

This is a recycling and waste management company, which has a workshop at Thorn Cross. Televisions and monitors are dismantled into component parts for recycling. The workshop employs 17 prisoners. This workshop has been a popular choice for prisoners, as they earn above-average wages. However, it closed towards the end of the reporting period, as the prison wanted to redeploy the officer who was in charge, and the company was unwilling to provide a replacement. Although a sad loss, its closure will assist in achieving the target of more work placements in the community.

- **Remade with Hope**

This is a private company, which recycles returned/unsold clothes and household goods from a major UK retailer. It employs 30 prisoners. The workshop has a turnover of 20,000 items per week. The returned goods have their labels destroyed and then are sorted, packaged and sent to various outlets, both home and abroad. The wages are above average, and bonuses can be obtained if targets are met.

- **Timpson**

There are two workshops in operation, where prisoners learn shoe-mending skills, timekeeping and workshop skills. They do not obtain any formal qualifications, but do have the experience of working in a busy workplace where standards of work have to be maintained. The staff are helpful, and the prisoners appear to enjoy the work. Prisoners who apply to work in a Timpson shop on release are guaranteed an interview.

- **Max Spielmann**

This unit usually has 18 prisoners working in it. They generally stay here once placed. The unit transfers VHS recordings to CD. No formal qualifications are obtained, but the prisoners are exposed to a working environment where timekeeping and a good work ethic are important.

- **Kitchen**

The kitchen cooks all the meals for the establishment, providing for a variety of dietary and religious needs. The prisoners here learn to cook mass-produced meals. They all obtain food hygiene certificates. Unfortunately, this allows only limited access to catering (typically, function catering) upon release.

- **Blackcap Café**

This is a fully functioning café. It employs five prisoners who, after training for six months (500 hours) and passing the examination, receive an NVQ level 2

qualification in catering. This is a rolling course where the trainees are at different levels of ability.

- **Baker Boys**

This catering facility runs a 12-week course and has 10 prisoners in training. Once trained, they obtain an NVQ level 2 qualification, which allows them to work in catering once they are released. This course is run by Novus.

- **Land-based activities**

This is the in-house grounds department. It is responsible for maintaining the gardens, grounds and smallholdings. There are various greenhouses and poly-tunnels growing a variety of plants, either grown from seed or brought in.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1. The new ROTL policy and changes to the administration of home detention curfew (HDC; electronic tagging) brought some challenges initially, but both are now embedded. The absence and the untimely death of the greatly respected governor responsible for the OMU has meant that the last few months have not been easy for the staff. They are to be commended for the way in which they have managed such a difficult situation. Increased staffing in the OMU has meant that there are now few delays in processing ROTL applications. One of the weekly 'drop-in' sessions has now been cancelled, as the improvement in the speed at which applications are processed has meant fewer concerns from prisoners. That said, complaints categorised as 'OASys' accounted for one-third of the complaints submitted by prisoners.

7.3.2. Previously, it has been possible for the prisoners to find their own work-out placements. These would have to be vetted for health and safety, and security considerations, which all take staff time. There have also been concerns that the placements were not always what they seemed and may, in fact, have been an opportunity to carry on inappropriate activity. For these reasons, the prisoners are now nearly all placed in placements that the prison has sourced.

7.3.3. The OMU continues to be housed in wholly unsuitable accommodation. The large portacabin has long passed its sell-by date and, although in our last report we were hopeful that new accommodation was in sight, there is still no progress on a replacement. With every year that passes, the issues associated with this inadequate building are compounded.

7.3.4. Due to the nature of the OMU department, there is a dedicated team of offender supervisors who enable sentence plans, initial interviews and OASys updates to be completed to timescales. All sentence plans are completed within the first eight weeks of prisoners' arrival at the establishment. The OMU holds regular meetings with all partner agencies to ensure and enable closer and better working communications.

7.3.5. Offending behaviour programmes are expected to be completed by prisoners at closed establishments, prior to transfer to a category D prison such as Thorn Cross. However, if it is deemed that a prisoner would benefit from a programme, this

can be arranged through the ROTL process. The Sycamore Tree programme continues to be available, as are programmes provided through the drug and alcohol service (CGL).

7.3.6. There is a well-established integrated risk management team, chaired by the head of the OMU, which meets monthly to review statistics and discuss any issues relating to prisoners who are of concern or are high risk. These meetings are well attended by relevant parties and agencies, and a member of the Board. The case conference process has been updated and issued to all involved. They are now called risk management meetings (RMMs). The RMMs attended by the Board show that, although useful, in that they enable a wide range of views to be expressed, they would benefit from a clearer focus and structure.

7.3.7. A member of the probation team and a designated IPP/lifer lead meet this group regularly. A new life skills course, run by Seetec, has been targeted at this group. A coaching initiative has been commissioned, but is on hold until the lockdown ends.

## **7.4 Family contact**

7.4.1. COVID-19 and the lockdown of the prison meant the cancellation of visits and ROTL, clearly disrupting prisoners' contact with their families. Each prisoner is asked weekly what contact they have had with their family. They have been given extra telephone credit by the prison, and access to personal mobile phones is being organised. Video links are being provided where necessary, so that the prisoners can talk and see dying relatives and virtually attend funerals.

7.4.2. There are at least six family days organised by Partners of Prisoners (POPs), each with a different theme. These are supplemented by events organised by Novus, such as the well-received one linked to Tate Liverpool. Family forums, which have been identified as good practice by the regional reducing offending lead, allow families to tour the prison and ask staff questions about its operation. Visits can be booked online or by telephone. Although difficulties in booking visits has been a concern in the past, this has not been the case during the reporting year. The visits hall is bright and airy, with crèche facilities and food available. When visits have been observed, the atmosphere has been relaxed.

7.4.3. Although payphones are available on every unit, the concerns expressed in our last report over the cost of the calls remain. During the COVID-19 pandemic, plans were drawn up to facilitate the use of mobile phones by prisoners. As this was rehearsed in our last report and received a categorical refusal by the minister even to consider it, it will be interesting to see how the proposed use pans out.

7.4.4. Mail is delivered regularly, and use is made of the 'email-a-prisoner' scheme.

7.4.5. One of the residential units has been designated as a family unit. This is to give the prisoners on that unit an incentive as they have to share rooms. For example, they have a later time (7pm) to return from ROTL. Additional family activities are made available.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

7.5.1. The OMU team, Shelter, CRC, Jobcentre Plus and Achieve are located within the same building, which allows for the easy sharing of information. This is especially

useful when planning for release. Reports for parole boards are provided in a timely manner by offender supervisors. Those seen by Board members would suggest that they are thorough and thoughtful, balancing the needs of the prisoner, victims and the wider community.

7.5.2. Interactions between prisoners and prison staff observed throughout the year have been respectful and good humoured. Officers know the prisoners in their care, and how to respond to and support them.

7.5.3. Of the 283 prisoners released during the reporting year, only four had no accommodation, with between 5% and 10% assessed as requiring an enhanced level of supervision at approved premises.

7.5.4. The Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company began a 'through-the-gate' programme on 1 April 2019. The aim of this integrated programme is to produce pre-release plans that avoid duplication and ensure that those working with prisoners in the community have an understanding of the work done in prison. When released, the prisoners often have a great deal to do in a very short space of time, and sometimes the logistics of this causes prisoners to 'fall at the first hurdle'. Those returning to Cheshire, Greater Manchester or Merseyside now have the opportunity to have their first appointment on release with a member of the team at Thorn Cross. This new service has quickly established itself and has been well received.

7.5.5. Prisoners managed by the CRC who are veterans, aged between 18 and 25 years, have complex needs or require support to sustain employment in the community can receive additional support from integrated through-the-gate staff for up to three months when they return to the community.

## 8. The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	9
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	6
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6 (2 dual boarding)
Total number of visits to the establishment	219
Total number of segregation reviews attended	0

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	0	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives, sanctions	1	0
C	Equality	2	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	3	2
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	8	3
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	6	5
F	Food and kitchens	0	3
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	0	0
H1	Property within this establishment	5	0
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	11	14
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	2	0

I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, re categorisation	27	10
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	4	0
K	Transfers	0	0
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	14	1
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>40</b>



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