



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

**For reporting year
1 May 2020 to 30 April 2021**

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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 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 currently reduced by 60 as improvements to fire safety are carried out. The prisoners are housed in eight 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 Greater Manchester Mental Health (GMMH).

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.

3.1 Background to the report

3.1.1. The reporting year has seen the prison, like the rest of society, move in and out of various levels of restrictions caused by the pandemic. Staff and residents have, in the main, risen to the many challenges that this has brought. There were no cases amongst the residents until the beginning of October and numbers remained small until January 2021 when the prison was declared an outbreak site with around 50 cases. The prompt action by staff and the cooperation of residents meant that the outbreak was contained and short lived.

3.1.2. The Governor and his staff worked hard to minimise the effects of a curtailment of the usual rehabilitative regime at Thorn Cross and to manage the

unsettling effect that was sometimes caused, especially when the relaxation of measures inside the prison happened at a slower rate than those on the outside.

3.1.3 The Board developed a number of ways in which we could monitor the work of the prison indirectly. We have been fortunate in that the geography of the estate and the few cases of Covid, have meant that direct monitoring has been possible for much of the year, although we have not always been informed when the timings of meetings have been changed.

3.1.4. There have been a number of changes in roles for senior staff, including staff new to Thorn Cross. These changes have been seamless. The offender management in custody (OMiC) model began to be introduced towards the end of our reporting year, with staff appointed as custodial managers starting their new roles with great enthusiasm.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

Thorn Cross continues to be a very safe establishment. Nearly all prisoners and staff consider Thorn Cross to be safe. Incidents of violence and bullying continue to be rare. There is a range of support services that are readily available and the safer custody team works well, liaising closely with mental health services.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

There is a courteous and respectful regime and staff-prisoner relationships are generally very good. Staff at all levels are very visible and the prisoners know who to approach for help and support and are confident that it will be given. Accommodation is of a good standard.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

Prisoners' healthcare is as good as that in the community, in some cases better. Needs are carefully assessed and responded to. The dedicated mental health service is an asset.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

The rehabilitative culture of Thorn Cross pervades every area of its work with bespoke provision. There is good partnership working and generally good relationships between the prisoners and the staff. However, the pandemic has meant that some rehabilitative work was unable to be carried out.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

3.3.1. The number of places in the open estate nationally has fallen, which means there are a number of prisoners who are unable to benefit from the rehabilitative culture they offer and so aid a reduction in reoffending.

3.3.2. Having seen an increase in prisoners who have more complex needs, adequate resources to meet their needs should follow. (5.2.6)

3.3.3. The lack of approved premises to which prisoners can be released is a concern and more needs to be done to provide suitable accommodation. (7.4.3)

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

3.3.4. It is imperative to ensure that the learning from the positive use of mobile phones is not lost and that this temporary measure becomes a permanent feature of the open estate. (3.4 and 7.4.1)

3.3.5. Thorn Cross is now taking prisoners who are serving longer sentences and who have longer to go to their possible release date. It is now possible for a prisoner to move from a high security prison straight to the open estate. In our view this is unfair on such prisoners who struggle to adapt and need a great deal of support. These arrangements need urgent review. (4.1.5 and 5.2.6)

3.3.6. The prison is failing in its duty to provide a decent fire retardant seating, as referenced in our last report. An alternative seating needs to be found. (3.4)

3.3.7. The problem of prisoners being separated from their property during transfer persists. This clearly remains a systemic issue that needs fixing. (5.8)

3.3.8. In our report two years ago we commented on the need to upgrade the IT systems. They are no better. Too much time is wasted waiting for slow systems to respond. (7.1.4)

TO THE GOVERNOR

3.3.10. To ensure that the new OMiC model of working becomes embedded and its impact is noted in terms of outcomes for prisoners. (5.3.3)

3.3.11. To take steps to reduce the amount of contraband that is brought onto the estate by intruders.(4.6.6)

3.3.12. To re visit the methods used to identify those prisoners who may be at most risk of absconding so as to continue to drive down the number of absconds. (4.6.7)

3.3.13. The staffing detail should be looked at to see how in person and virtual (phone and video) visits can be maintained. (7.4.2)

3.3.14. The diversity and equality action team needs to meet regularly with data being analysed to measure the impact of all areas of the prison's work and shared with the Board in a timely manner. (5.4.3 and 5.4.4)

3.3.15 To provide the Board with regular complaints monitoring information (5.7.2)

3.4 Progress since the last report

Use of mobile phones	Around 70 prisoners are now regularly using mobile phones under supervision. This provision is welcome and of real benefit to the prisoners and their rehabilitation.
Cost of phone calls	During the pandemic the cost of calls using the pin phone system was reduced nationally, which was a positive move. An additional £5 phone credit given to the prisoners has been welcomed.
Offender management unit (OMU) building	The replacement OMU building is due to commence on site works in October 2021.
Provision of suitable chairs	The search for a fire resistant chair, which is more decent than the unacceptable plastic tub chairs continues.
Updating of fire alarm system	The fire safety improvement project continues and is scheduled for completion in September / October 21.
Transfer of prisoners who are drug free	The suitability and complexity of prisoners received is a concern. Work is ongoing with the sending prisons to minimise risk. Enhanced reception processes have been instigated.

<p>Transfer of prisoners who have ongoing health treatment</p>	<p>This continues to be an area of concern and is being monitored through the local delivery board in partnership with the health provider.</p>
<p>Property getting lost on transfer</p>	<p>This continues to be a concern raised by prisoners who arrive at Thorn Cross without some of their property. The prison has improved some of its practices to try and ensure that any prisoners transferred back to the closed estate leave with all of their property.</p>
<p>Level of absconds</p>	<p>Despite a spike in absconds towards the end of the reporting year, the number for the reporting year is half what it was for the previous year.</p>
<p>Number of prisoners working in the community</p>	<p>Only essential work placements took place for much of the year, but plans are in place to increase the number to 120 by August 2021. This will benefit efforts towards rehabilitation.</p>

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1. During the pandemic year, the number and frequency of new prisoners arriving at the prison has fluctuated, but overall has reduced. This is due to lockdown restrictions and reduced capacity because of fire safety improvements.

4.1.2. Prisoners arriving at Thorn Cross are moved directly onto the reverse cohorting unit (RCU). This supports infection control and was highlighted as an example of positive practice in the short scrutiny visit carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). The prisoners were initially required to isolate for 14 days on the RCU before moving into the main estate. This requirement was changed in November 2020, reflecting changes nationally. Prisoners in receipt of two negative Covid tests, can now be moved off the RCU after a minimum of 7 days.

4.1.3. The planned implementation of a new-style induction process has been halted by Covid and will need to be revisited as regimes relax. During the pandemic, there have been few, if any, opportunities for the Board to meet with new cohorts on arrival. The induction process is comprehensive, with a care custody record directing the induction. Full induction takes place once the prisoners have finished their isolation on RCU. However, a confidential first night risks and triggers interview is carried out on arrival, with any concerns shared with the safer custody team or other partners. The prisoners are able to raise any concerns very quickly and peer support is available.

4.1.4. Throughout the reporting year, the prison has remained under immense pressure to remain at capacity due to population pressures in the wider estate. The RCU initially accommodated six prisoners. This was later increased to 12. The RCU unit was moved to a bigger unit which lent itself to two separate households of 14 prisoners. The RCU is generally appreciated by the prisoners, with spacious rooms and the freedom to move freely around the unit and its dedicated exercise yard.

4.1.5. Pressures within the prison estate have resulted in demographic changes for new cohorts. More prisoners are being received from out of area, rather than from within the Greater Manchester cluster. Additionally, prisoners are also being taken with up to three years to serve before their release. The potential effects of these trends have been highlighted by the Governor. Historically, close working relationships with establishments within the cluster have been beneficial in ensuring that prisoners chosen for Thorn Cross are best placed to settle and progress well in the open estate. Prisoners received from outside the cluster and those taken earlier in their sentence may have more complex needs and be at greater risk of absconding. This is a trend that should be reviewed and, should it continue, monitored.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1. Levels of self-harm and the number of assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documents opened remain very low at Thorn Cross.

Period	May 2018 – April 2019	May 2019 – April 2020	May 2020 – April 2021
No. of self-inflicted deaths	0	0	0
No. of self-harm incidents	0	0	3
No. of deaths in custody	0	1	0
No. of ACCTs opened	6	4	6

4.2.2. Since national restrictions started three incidences of self-harm have occurred in comparison to none in the previous year. These took place in May and June and two occurred on the same day. These were all serious enough to require a trip to hospital. Two were as a result of drug taking.

4.2.3. There was a single death in custody from natural causes for the 2019-20 reporting year. The Prison and Probation Ombudsman's (PPO) report has now been received with recommendations. An action plan has been drawn up and is being implemented.

4.2.4. So that additional support can be offered, staff have been identifying prisoners who have been on an ACCT in the last 18 months. ACCT documents were reviewed as part of the HMIP scrutiny visit (April 2021) and found to be good, with regular quality assurance taking place. Timely training of staff in using the latest version of ACCT documentation is taking place alongside the introduction of ACCT champions. Weekly safety intervention meetings have continued throughout the reporting year. These meetings are multi-disciplinary and share best practice and resources in order to best support prisoners in need. The names of ACCT assessors on duty are displayed clearly at the gate. Prisoners on ACCTS report feeling well supported through the process. It is important that the prison maintains an adequate number of trained ACCT assessors.

4.2.5. It is acknowledged that prisoners will find their support in different forms. This may include peer support, family contact, staff working around the estate, chaplaincy, gym staff, wing staff and so on. Prisoners tell Board members that they feel there is someone they can turn to. Unit officers and residential managers are visible and an 'open door' policy is operated on all residential units. During the reporting year, staff prisoner relationships observed have been consistently positive and respectful.

4.4.2. The establishment has many and varied support and advice agencies available for all prisoners. These include Listeners (whose details are clearly displayed on units), mentors, (who offer weekly drop-in sessions) and a direct telephone line to the Samaritans, which is widely advertised and displayed around PIN phone areas. During the pandemic, men volunteering as Listeners have not been able to receive face to face support from Samaritans. They have instead had access to dial-in support from Samaritans via the POPIN phone system. There is a safer custody answer phone av

ailable to families. This is advertised in the visits hall and is also available via the POPS website. Safer custody works closely with mental health services and operates a joint welfare check for prisoners who are in crisis and are in need of additional support.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1. Violent incidents at Thorn Cross thankfully continue to be rare. Throughout the reporting year, and despite the national restrictions, the atmosphere in and around the prison estate has invariably felt relaxed and respectful. Although still low, figures for this year and last suggest a relative increase in violent incidents. This should continue to be monitored to see if this reflects an ongoing trend. During the reporting year, there was one incident of a violent act by a prisoner against officers, and seven incidences of prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Staff are adept at using de-escalation techniques where necessary.

Period	May 2018 – April 2019	May 2019 – April 2020	May 2020 – April 2021
No. of incidents of bullying	0	1	0
No. self-isolating for own protection	0	0	0
No. of assaults on prisoners	0	3	7
No. of assaults on staff	0	3	1

4.3.2. The vast majority of prisoners feel safe. While it is known that some prisoners have associations with organised crime gangs outside the prison, there is no observable gang culture in the prison. Prisoners report that bullying is not tolerated by prison staff.

4.3.3. There have been no serious incidents in the reporting year. During the pandemic, the prison has not been able to undertake regular simulation exercises. These would ordinarily be observed by the Board. Thorn Cross does not have its own trained negotiators. However, the security manager has been encouraging staff to come forward for training and, at the time of writing, one staff member has agreed to be trained. This is clearly of benefit, as the prison will not be reliant on volunteers from other institutions who would not have the same degree of knowledge, familiarity and understanding of the prison, its regime and prisoners. It has been suggested that all new staff are asked to help in the planning and setting up of the command suite. This will improve general staff awareness of serious incident procedures.

4.4 Vulnerable prisoners, safeguarding

4.4.1. The prison continues to identify vulnerable prisoners on arrival. The mental health team triage all new arrivals as part of the induction healthcare screening

process. This allows any concerns to be quickly identified and referred to the appropriate support agency/service.

4.4.3. There continues to be a wellbeing unit, which has additional Listeners, a comfortable room and less sterile décor. 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.

4.4.4. Prisoners who are clinically vulnerable and so meet the shielding requirements have been encouraged to shield throughout the reporting year. Initially, 12 prisoners chose to shield. At the time of writing, only two prisoners are continuing to shield. These prisoners have continual access to the open air, are issued with an individual phone for accessing their PIN accredited contacts, have regular visits from healthcare and twice daily welfare checks by unit officers.

4.4.5. Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose.

4.5 Use of force

4.5.1. During the reporting year, there was very little use of force. Handcuffs were used on five occasions to prevent absconds while escorting a prisoner. This represents a substantial decrease from the previous year.

4.6 Substance misuse

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

4.6.2. Although steroid paraphernalia is regularly found the top three drugs of choice continue to be cannabis, alcohol and cocaine.

4.6.3. Regular mandatory drug tests (MDT) were stopped during both lockdowns. The number of tests completed during the reporting year is therefore very significantly lower than for the last reporting year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that drug use continued and may have increased during both lockdowns. There has been continuous effort to interrupt supply. The first batch of 10 MDT tests performed in October resulted in five positive tests.

MDT	Number of tests	Number of positives
Random test	36	4
Suspicion tests	14	10
Risk tests	6	1
Test totals	56	15 (11 cannabis)

4.6.4. Thorn Cross has been selected to be part of a year-long pilot scheme for mouth swab testing. Tests performed to date are being recorded as suspicion tests. The intention is to test prisoners before they are granted release on temporary licence (ROTL). Testing will also be performed on return from ROTL and work

placements. As well as helping to keep the prison community safe and informing risk assessments, these findings will also hold value in reassuring employers. Evidence of negative tests may be used to support prisoners with their sentence planning and applying for jobs. Prisoners have been reassured that a positive test will not result in being placed on report. Instead, a referral to CGL will be triggered and, to avoid a sanction, prisoners will be given 28 days to show engagement and commitment to the support offered.

4.6.5. The benefits of this scheme are that tests are quick and less intrusive to administer and give immediate results. As recovery progresses and increasing numbers of prisoners begin working out of the establishment, more staff are being sought for training in MDT and swab testing.

4.6.6. Managing the security of estate boundaries is a continual challenge. The number of unauthorised 'drop-offs' is worrying and has been an increasing problem during the reporting year. Intruders were on site several times during lockdowns and continue to be so. Extra patrols are being carried out during the night, by staff and the police alike. The prison continues to work closely with the police and national search teams. A named police liaison officer for intruders and trafficking has been allocated to the prison.

4.6.7. The recent increase in absconds and drops has attracted media attention, which has included an interview with the local MP broadcast on Radio Merseyside. Additionally, the local Appleton Thorn community have increasingly been voicing safety concerns. Meetings have been held between the deputy governor and the local borough councillor and chairman of Appleton parish council. These have been considered helpful and reassuring.

4.6.8. As the prison regime re-opens, there is a focus on reducing intruders, absconding and drug demand by building incentives into the regime through increasing ROTL, workouts, family contact, access to gym and awareness of swab testing.

4.6.9. The monthly publication of a drugs strategy newsletter began in March. This new initiative aims to assist and help staff to support the prison's drug strategy policy.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1. As a response to the pandemic, additional accommodation has been provided with the installation of 44 pods. These provide single rooms, each with its own ensuite and heating. This provision has meant that all dual occupancy rooms could become single. The project was beset with delay after delay and it was only as work was nearing completion that the external power supply to the prison was found to be insufficient, resulting in a generator having to be installed. The outside works are yet to be completed. The old 'donkey shed' and a disused caravan have been converted

by the men to provide association areas. At one point the prisoners were having to go to a neighbouring unit to get their meals, an unsatisfactory arrangement especially in poor weather.

5.1.2. The unit office for the pods (unit 8) is unsatisfactory and is set to be improved.

5.1.3. The fire project has been underway throughout the year bringing the fire safety requirements up to date. This has meant that each unit, in turn, has been emptied to enable the work to be undertaken. These moves have taken careful planning and have happened at a weekend, with extra staff coming in to help. They have been carried out efficiently with the minimum of disruption.

5.1.4. The eight residential units are clean and well maintained. Showers are freely available for most of the day with adequate washing facilities. Washing machines are also readily available, which are now reliable and of good standard - a welcome improvement.

5.1.5. The association areas are bright and airy with good dining facilities and a servery. The food is taken to the units from the kitchen in trolleys. There were concerns during the year about the cleanliness of the trolleys but a cleaning regime has been put in place and this has much improved. There are also more prisoners regularly wearing the required protective footwear when moving the trolleys, but this needs to be continuously monitored.

5.1.6. There are always a number of menu 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. There is a small kitchen area on each of the four corridors on a unit. The prisoners can prepare their own meals, using items they have bought in their weekly canteen. They are kept clean and tidy by the prisoners.

5.1.7. An additional and larger oven in the kitchen, should help reduce the time from cooking food to it being placed in the heated trolleys to be taken to the residential units. Placing the food in these trolleys can affect the temperature and thus the quality of food.

5.1.8. 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. During the last year it has become the usual practice for a prisoner who is being returned to closed conditions to be kept in his own room. Transfers happen in a matter of hours after the decision is made and this arrangement has worked well.

5.2.2. The adjudication process is used appropriately when prisoners have not followed the rules by, for example, having an unauthorised mobile phone. Although we have not observed many, those seen have been conducted fairly and

respectfully. During the reporting year there have been 266 adjudications for 124 prisoners for 476 separate offences. Forty-one men were returned to closed conditions, mainly for possession of drugs and/or unauthorised phones.

5.2.3 The Governor has made use of the independent adjudicator for some adjudications. These are held by a judge who can impose additional days on the prisoner's sentence. Four prisoners have appeared before a judge for a total of six charges, with a total of 95 days added between them. Such additional sentencing sends a powerful message to the prison community and is one that the Board supports.

Although an IA cannot add additional days onto a life or indeterminate public protection (IPP) sentence the Parole Board would take note that such an adjudication had taken place.

5.2.4. Adjudications have been much improved by the introduction of clearer guidance that gives the adjudicator aggravating and mitigating factors to consider before deciding on a suitable sanction. The governors who carry out the adjudications would benefit from regular standardisation, so that the prisoners can be assured that a decision taken by one governor will be broadly similar to that taken by another or indeed the same governor on the same day.

5.2.5. A more detailed analysis of adjudication outcomes has begun to take place. This is a welcome development.

5.2.6. At the end of the reporting year, there were 51 prisoners serving life or IPP sentences, compared with 40 at the start of the year. These prisoners have additional and often complex needs, but an increase in their number is not matched by an increase in resources to manage them.

5.3 Staff-prisoner/detainee relationships, key workers

5.3.1. The relationships between the staff and the prisoners are good. The prisoners are treated with courtesy and respect. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere across the estate. Throughout the pandemic this has been maintained, even when visits were stopped and prisoners were being confined to their unit (as was the case at the start of the pandemic). The officers know the prisoners in their care well. When they use their interactions with the prisoners to best use, it enables the prisoners to reflect and resolve matters for themselves.

5.3.2. The old style prisoners' representatives meeting was re-styled into a prison council and became a much improved forum for discussion and communication. The prisoners' concerns are carefully listened and responded to.

5.3.3. The OMiC scheme was introduced just as the reporting year ended. This has meant an increase in the number of custodial managers who have been deployed in a number of areas. We will monitor the impact of these new roles during the year.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1. 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. The diversity and equality action team has only met twice in the reporting year. Although this is understandable, because of the impact of Covid on the work of the prison and the workload of the staff, it is not acceptable and means that important work could be missed. The meetings have re-started and ought to provide a much needed focus for analysis of data, which has been collected throughout, and keep equality, diversity and inclusion central to the work of the prison.

5.4.4. The data that is collected should be analysed more thoroughly so it is possible to measure the impact of all areas of the prison's work. Currently this is not the case and it has been impossible to obtain basic data such as the ethnic breakdown of the prison population 12 months ago compared to the present day.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1. The chaplain and his staff play an important role in the pastoral life of Thorn Cross. Support for vulnerable and bereaved prisoners is given for all, irrespective of faith. Understandably the services and other activities the chaplaincy provides, e.g. concerts, have been severely curtailed this year. When services have been able to take place, they have been well received although the numbers taking part have been limited. Some have taken place outside.

5.5.2. There are several faiths represented in the prison population. The chaplaincy would usually arrange 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. There are three levels of incentive: 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. Currently, 90% of the men are at an enhanced level, which is what you would expect to find in an open prison.

5.6.2. 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). As stated in last year's report, some thought should be given to developing alternative sanctions suited to the open estate.

5.6.3. The number of prisoners who have the highest level of IEP continues to be over 90%.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1. During our reporting year there were 93 complaints compared to just over 300 for the previous year. A dedicated staff member coordinates the complaints system and proactively chases up late responses, including those to other establishments. They are generally answered in a timely manner with replies typed. Replies are

appropriate but often are couched in managerial and at times impenetrable language. More care needs to be given to ensuring that the complainant can read and understand what is read.

5.7.2 It has proved difficult for the board to get regular analysis of the number and type of complaints.

5.8 Property

5.8.1. Property that goes missing during transfer continues to be a concern for some of the prisoners. It sometimes feels as if the prison authorities consider missing property to be a normal aspect of prison life. The Board does not share that view. The missing items are sometimes of great sentimental value such as photographs and letters. 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. They are sometimes given very little notice that they are to be transferred, resulting in haphazard and rushed packing.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare: general

6.1.1 The quality of healthcare is good, as evidenced by the very small number of complaints (two between December 2020 and March 2021) and the positive responses from prisoners. Surveys carried out during the last year indicate a high level of satisfaction with the health services and an appreciation of the work done to reduce the impact of Covid within the prison.

6.1.2. The prison was classed as an outbreak site in January 2021, although this was confined to two of the eight units. The outbreak was successfully contained with the support of Public Health England and services were well prepared to manage contagious diseases. In total 55 men tested positive during the outbreak, although only one required hospitalisation and there have been no further cases since February 2021.

6.1.3. Mass testing was carried out across the whole site, testing was implemented on reception and in the reverse cohort unit (RCU) and a vaccination programme is currently in place, the rollout being broadly similar to that in the community. Respondents to the ABL health survey in August 2020 felt that healthcare had improved during lockdown.

6.1.4. Healthcare is commissioned by NHS England and was 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 health care. There are no inpatient facilities in the prison so prisoners requiring hospitalisation are cared for at the local or specialist hospital.

6.1.5. A local delivery board meets every three months to assess and evaluate provision, with representatives from all health sectors, including the public health team in Warrington. Weekly prisoner meetings are regularly attended by healthcare

staff and very few concerns have been identified. Healthcare staff are always involved in serious incidents, assessment for work interviews and segregation reviews.

6.1.6. The quality framework submission for patient safety, quality and performance has been graded positively for each quarter of the year. There have been no deaths in custody or serious incidents reported this year. The PPO recommendations from a death in custody in 2019 have largely been implemented. These include; training in use of blood pressure monitors and referral processes, secondary health screening to be completed within seven days of arrival, and protocols to improve communications between the ambulance service and gate staff.

6.2 Primary healthcare

6.2.1. Staffing has been below full capacity for most of the year, with one nurse on long term sick, although recruitment for a new full time Band 6 post has recently taken place. GP clinics have been maintained throughout the year, with a current waiting time of three days for a face to face appointment.

6.2.2. Dentistry clinics have a legacy waiting list this year of patients requiring dental aerosol-generated treatment, although this is being well managed, with a new private service provider (Smart Dental) taking over in April. Apart from lockdown periods, the majority of other routine specialist clinics have been maintained over the year, although with reduced capacity.

6.2.3. Non-attendance at appointments (DNAs) has continued to reduce over the year, as the prison recognised the difficulties faced by some prisoners whose work placements made it difficult for them to attend within the normal schedule for appointments. New shift patterns were implemented to take account of these issues. The ABL health survey in August 2020 showed that 62% of respondents in the prison felt that the appointments system was well managed. In February there were eight DNAs for GPs, 16 for PWP's and 55 for nurses, the latter mainly because prisoners are reluctant to attend appointments for dry blood spot testing for HIV and hepatitis.

6.2.4. Medicines management meetings have resumed on a weekly basis and now are held with two other local prisons - Risley and Hindley - rather than on a wider regional basis. The pharmacy service has benefitted from professional oversight and improved staffing. The appointment of a new pharmacy technician who is now involved with all reception screenings has proved very effective. Medicines are administered in a safe and confidential manner. Sixty-nine percent of prisoners surveyed in the ABL health survey in August 2020 agreed that medicine management in the prison is good.

6.2.5. In October 2020, and despite Covid-19 restrictions, a new health and wellbeing peer mentor scheme was introduced to ensure that prisoners could still receive health and wellbeing support in the absence of the public health practitioner and Warrington wellbeing support. The programme was in response to the ABL health survey in August 2020, which found that around half of north-west prisoners who responded to the survey felt their physical health and mental health had

declined during Covid-19 as well as their wellbeing. The primary aim of the scheme at this early stage is to offer weight management support and to deliver health improvement messages through fully trained peer mentors.

6.2.6. Early signs indicate a good take up of the peer mentor drop-in clinics of around 80 prisoners per week. Qualitative feedback from the peer mentors highlight the most common reasons for attending the drop in to be weight loss; tracking of body fat and muscle; fitness progress and obtaining health and lifestyle information.

6.3 Mental healthcare

6.3.1. A new psychology professional was appointed on a part time basis, shared with another local prison and their case load is increasing gradually. This service is being advertised through posters, prisoner forums and other meetings. A mental health nurse reviews all reception prisoners on arrival and follows up with visits to the RCU to carry out further assessments.

6.3.2. Over the year the prison has implemented a new multi-agency approach to mental health and wellbeing, in response to concerns previously raised by prisoners about the need for additional support and counselling. All of the associated services have been relocated into one building and communication and management oversight has improved as a result. Mental health practitioners are now sited at the prison and the joint working with other departments is helping to improve prisoner outcomes.

6.3.3. There is no longer any local control over prisoner categorisation. As a result, the prison is having to accommodate more complex residents from the longterm high security estate, who are being moved to open prisons. There is a need to develop a better handover and transition process as some of these prisoners find it difficult to adjust to the relative freedoms of an open prison. As a consequence, they are not always able to take full advantage of the opportunities for rehabilitation and resettlement. The prison is currently looking at what support can be offered to help with this adjustment.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1. There have been no social care referrals this year. Links with the local authority have remained strong despite lockdown periods and this mature partnership working between the prison, health commissioner and health providers has delivered effective services.

6.5 Exercise, time out of cell

6.5.1. The regime at Thorn Cross has been severely affected by the Covid lockdown, leading to longer periods of time in units, and restricted access to physical activity. The use of the gym has been curtailed throughout the year and when open, there has been restricted use of equipment and shorter sessions. However, it is currently back to full use and is well used. Most prisoners are able to access the gym for up to five sessions a week in Covid-safe conditions.

6.5.2. The prison received criticism during the HMIP short scrutiny visit (June 2020) for its early lockdown regime. The regime prioritised the preservation of life and keeping prisoners and staff safe during lockdown. However, the resulting regime was considered disproportionately restrictive, at odds with the open estate ethos and not defensible. Concerns were raised that an over-focus on safety could not be justified, as prisoners had lost, or were at risk of, losing jobs. Our own observations during this period showed that the prisoners were understandably frustrated at the cessation of ROTL and visits and worried about their jobs and sentence progression. Conversely however, they voiced understanding and appreciation of the measures in place to keep them safe.

6.5.3. The prison has made extensive use of its grounds during the pandemic and has encouraged walking, running, keep fit and circuit training on the sports field. This has all been socially distanced, with restrictions on the numbers of participants, signposted routes and sanitiser provision at strategic points.

6.5.4. Outside association has been carefully monitored and sessions have been kept on a cohort basis so that prisoners are not able to mix with those from different units. Prisoners on the RCU have a separate outdoor area for association and exercise.

6.6 Drug rehabilitation

6.6.1. The Change Grow Live (CGL) service seeks to ensure 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 March 2021, CGL had a caseload of 133, which included 33 new referrals. Currently all of the recovery teams are back on site and carrying out clinical reviews and on average up to seven service users are on clinical programmes, mainly methadone. The provision of Naloxone nasal spray was a notable practice to improve prisoner safety.

6.6.2. Full workplace risk assessments are in place and more resources have been put in place to test those prisoners leaving and returning from ROTL and work placements. A pilot scheme to use swab testing to identify substance misuse in this cohort is underway although it is too early to indicate its effectiveness.

6.6.3. The service provided by CGL and partner organisations is impressive. During Covid, many of the therapeutic groups and outside agencies have been restricted. However, distraction packs were produced regularly by wellbeing partners. CGL has managed to sustain face-to-face contact and mentor support throughout the year and the therapeutic groups are gradually being reintroduced.

6.6.4. 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. Although provision has seen some restrictions during Covid, support is now recovering.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1. During the pandemic, a number of wellbeing activities have had to be curtailed. As restrictions have eased, yoga sessions have been restarted and a peer

mentoring programme for weight loss has been set up. Prisoners have been given information on how to look after themselves and improve their health.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1. During the early stages of the pandemic no face-to-face teaching was allowed. So called 'distraction packs' were sent out containing puzzles, quizzes and some functional skills work. These packs were of little educational value and many residents did not use them. Some were sent work that related to their courses, but this was clearly difficult for practical courses. Written work that was produced was not marked. Open University learners did receive limited support during this period.

7.1.2. The open estate was able to return to teaching in September and all courses were restarted. The residents could only attend with others from the same bubble and there were only four spaces available in the classrooms and six in the workshops, resulting in reduced capacity. However, one consequence of this was that the learners in each class could receive more individual attention. Attendance quickly built up to near 100%.

7.1.3. On arrival the residents' records are looked at to see what level of course would be suitable and where necessary further assessments are done. Where appropriate, screening is undertaken to identify additional learning needs and how these can best be met.

7.1.4. Teaching is geared to the world outside of the prison. There are links with employers and there has been a most welcome upgrade of the IT systems that are used by the prisoners so that the latest software and equipment is available, increasing employability on release. The staff systems are still slow. However, the residents are still not allowed to use iPads or access the internet for their learning. Some residents continue to access college and university courses. Staff IT systems across the estate have not seen a similar upgrade, which hampers their effectiveness.

7.1.5. Staff have enthusiastically taken part in further training so that they can make full use of the upgraded IT systems in all areas of their teaching.

7.1.6. A variety of courses are available (number of participants in brackets); creative craft (2), IT (8), entrepreneurship (1), art and design (6), new business (7), food preparation and cooking (20), basic skills (19) with four prisoners following higher education courses. Four of these courses had a 100% pass rate.

7.1.7. The library is attractive and well stocked with books and DVD resources. It has remained closed since the start of the first lockdown but a delivery service has been set up, which enables the residents to have books or DVDs to be delivered to their unit and have them cleaned on return to the library.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1. A number of vocational courses are offered so that the prisoners will have a recognised skill to offer prospective employers on release. Three courses had a 100% pass rate in the reporting year. Currently the following are offered; food

production and cooking (15), bricklaying (14), plastering (11) and painting and decorating (7).

7.2.2. The pandemic had a significant impact on the availability of work both inside and outside of the prison, with provision changing in line with the lockdowns. Prison staff did their best to react to changing circumstances and communication and the response in the second and third lockdowns was much improved compared to that of the first.

7.2.3. As lockdowns eased, work was able to begin again. However, because of social distancing and the prison operating in two bubbles, the number of prisoners able to work inside the prison at any one time was reduced. prisoners working out of the prison could only do so in Covid secure premises.

7.2.4. The popular Railtrack course is due to restart and is a welcome return. Once trained to carry out repairs on the railways, the prisoners are virtually guaranteed employment on release. Remade with Hope (recycling goods from a major retailer) continues to be a popular job, which encourages good teamwork and a positive work ethos. The unit is always purposeful with a good respectful atmosphere. Farms and gardens workers learn new skills and can literally see the fruits of their labours. They keep the grounds of the prison bright and attractive.

7.2.5. Some companies who provide work at Thorn Cross are yet to return or have reduced the number of prisoners they employ. Work has begun on providing an improved staff mess with increased work opportunities. However, there is still the aim to increase the number of prisoners who are working out of the prison to 120. To aid this, the activities and reducing reoffending teams have been provided with much improved accommodation.

7.2.6. As restrictions began to be eased during spring, there were soon in excess of 30 men working in the community.

7.2.7. Although the prison aims to work with fewer employers, with each taking more prisoners, the prisoners are still able to self-refer to suitable placements.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1. The pandemic has severely limited the possibility for prisoners to be released on temporary licence (ROTL) to see their family, or to work. The prisoners have largely accepted the restrictions, although occasionally some do not understand that although the prison system's level of restrictions mirror that in the community, they are different. Staff have kept all the necessary risk assessments up to date so that as soon as ROTL was available, albeit on a restricted basis, prisoners were able to take advantage of it. This was appreciated by the prisoners.

7.3.2. At the start of Covid restrictions, a number of staff, including probation, were not on site, but were able to offer telephone interviews. More face-to-face interviews became available as the year progressed. Staff conducting them felt safe to do so and that they were able to provide a better service. On the very last day of our reporting year the 'drop-in' clinic at OMU returned on Friday afternoons. Previously OMU staff have visited residential units, enabling the prisoners to have some access to OMU staff.

7.3.3. 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.

7.3.4. 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).

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1. Family contact has, not unsurprisingly, been severely impacted by Covid 19 restrictions. The Board has been and remains very concerned at the impact this has had on the prisoners and on their rehabilitation. The prison has responded by giving extra phone credit and by allowing the use of approved mobile phones under supervised conditions. We raised the use of mobile phones two years ago and received an entirely negative response from the Minister. Out of necessity their use has been permitted and this has shown that this can work and be a useful tool in rehabilitating the prisoners for life outside the prison. The phones are kept securely in the visits hall, are available for inspection and are only used at designated times within sight of an officer. We hope that as society moves forward from the pandemic this welcome development is not lost.

7.4.2. In addition to the use of mobile phones, video calls were also enabled by the so-called 'Purple Visits'. These had some success, but so far have not been widely used, with prisoners sometimes reporting connection problems. There were also occasions when the timing of these visits and the use of mobile phones did not coincide with school times. At other times, they had to be cancelled due to insufficient staffing, especially when visits were taking place. When face-to-face visits did take place, Covid secure measures were adhered to, which included no physical contact. Families with young children tended not to book places on these visits.

7.4.3. Family ROTL has been able to take place, but on a severely limited basis. For example, towards the end of 2020 day release to the local area to meet a limited number of families began. Frustratingly, this had to stop after two weeks, when there was a rise in the number of cases in the local area.

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

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1. 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.

7.5.2. Discharge boards began in February with prisoners being supported and prepared for their release. This involves joint working between the different agencies both within and outside the prison. Despite the prison's best efforts, four prisoners

were released in the reporting year with no arranged accommodation and it is hoped that this number will decrease as society returns to a more normal state.

7.4.3. The lack of approved premises, although out of the prison's control, is a concern as it leads to a delay in release, in one case for several weeks. During the reporting year, 38 prisoners required the increased supervision approved premises provide.

7.5.4. 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. The 'through the gate' service is now well established, providing useful support.

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	7
Total number of visits to the establishment	108
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	2	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions		
C	Equality		
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	2	3
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	3	1
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends		2
F	Food and kitchens	3	
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care		5
H1	Property within this establishment		1
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	14	5
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)		1
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	10	1
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying		
K	Transfers		
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	1	
	Total number of applications	40	20



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