



[REDACTED]
Chairs, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Thorn Cross
Arley Road
Warrington,
Cheshire
WA4 4RL

MoJ Ref: ADR 081508

12 October 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

**HMP/YOI THORN CROSS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2019 – 30 APRIL 2020**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2020. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as you continued to be short of Board members during the reporting year.

I understand the Board's request to consider the use of mobile phones by prisoners and can confirm that during the Covid-19 outbreak mobile phones were distributed to all prisons that did not have in-cell telephony. The phones are restricted, recorded and monitored in the same way as landing and in-cell phones as they are integrated into the current PIN phone system infrastructure. The mobile phones were introduced at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross with prisoners having access to them in a designated area of the prison while under the supervision of prison officers. The mobile phones have enabled and supported prisoners to stay in touch with their family and friends, and the feedback received has been positive. The further roll out of in-cell telephony is planned to continue into the next phase of prisons, but implementation in to all other sites across the prison estate will be based on funding as it becomes available.

Regarding the further concern about the cost of telephone calls for prisoners to contact their family. The call tariff set for the PIN phone system attracts a lower charge at the weekend than those made during the core week and calls to mobile phones attract a much higher premium. Whilst this is a similar approach to fixed lines in private homes, as advised in my response last year the specific requirements and delivery of the PIN phone system in to prisons is reflected in the call costs. However, as prison visits were suspended during the Covid-19 outbreak, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) acted quickly to ensure that prisoners could maintain family contact despite the exceptional circumstances. To continue to support prisoners to stay in touch with their families HMPPS negotiated a temporary reduction in call charges. In addition to this, HMPPS is providing all prisoners with £5 additional PIN credit per week. These initiatives will be considered alongside the progress of recovery of prisons as a whole and individually through the published National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-national-framework-for-prison-regimes-and-services>. The Board will also be pleased to note that prisoners now have access to secure video calling at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross which provides an alternative opportunity for prisoners to stay in touch with their families without the associated PIN phone call costs.

Despite these concerns, it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison is safe and prisoners are treated with courtesy and respect. It is pleasing that the prison continues to be high performing and the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life and Staff Quality of Life surveys showed that further improvements had been made and HMP/YOI Thorn Cross' performance was better than other similar establishments. I was encouraged to read about the rehabilitative culture and the positive relationships staff have with prisoners to help them prepare for release. It is also pleasing to note that participation in education remains high and that there are many vocational training and work opportunities for prisoners to engage in.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Thorn Cross.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucy Frazer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and 'F'.

LUCY FRAZER QC MP

Annex

HMP/YOI THORN CROSS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2019 – 30 APRIL 2020

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Facilities Management

Offender Management Unit (OMU) Building Fabric

Ground surveys have recently been undertaken to assess the area identified for a replacement OMU building. This will feed into the project brief and it is expected that an outline business case for replacement of the building will be ready imminently. However, due to more urgent competing priorities within the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) capital projects budget it is not possible to confirm further programming and timing of the project's schedule at this time.

Replacement Chairs

The plastic tub chair was designed to provide a safe chair for use within cells across the whole prison estate. Its design took into consideration the recommendations of the Zahid Mubarek inquiry and guidance from MoJ Custodial Property. In 2008, the chair was approved for use within all categories of prisons and has now been in circulation for 12 years. However, the design is now under review and consultation with users has taken place as to how it could be improved.

Locally at the prison, each cell has a chair available for each prisoner and, at the time of purchase, they were the only ones available which met the fire safety standard requirements. As new in-cell chairs become available through Public Sector Prison Industries which meet the fire safety standard HMP/YOI Thorn Cross will give consideration to replacing the existing stock.

Fire Alarms

The fire safety improvement project commenced in July 2020 and will address the concerns raised by the Board. The work includes replacement of the fire alarm system, cabling, emergency lighting and some fire doors. It also includes the installation of additional fire exits, disabled ramps, fire/smoke stopping and smoke ventilation. The work is scheduled to be completed by August 2021.

Prisoner Transfers

Category D Suitability

HMPPS acknowledges the importance of effective management of transfers to open prisons to ensure individuals are held in prisons that match their security category and associated level of risk to the public. However, assessing an individual prisoner's eligibility and readiness for sentence progression is best undertaken locally by offender managers due to the complex and wide-ranging issues involved. To support this the Security Categorisation Policy Framework was published in February 2020 which sets out a revised process for the categorisation of adult males and young adult males. The new process introduces a more sophisticated attitude to risk, with less reliance on sentence length and an explicit set of risks to explore. At the heart of the new process is a new Digital Categorisation Service tool to support staff in identifying relevant risk factors and to decide on the most appropriate category.

Evidence from piloting this revised system has demonstrated that categorisation decisions are better taken using a broader range of risk factors. Implementation of the revised process was due to have begun in the spring, but due to Covid-19 it was concluded that the planned face-to-face delivery model was no longer a viable option. Testing of an effective remote delivery model is therefore planned to start and roll out across the male estate in the autumn.

Across the Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire Prison Group much work has been undertaken with the introduction of the Offender Management in Custody (OMIC) model to improve the quality of risk assessment and categorisation processes in each prison across the Group. Each prison now has a Senior Probation Officer (SPO) who supports the OMIC function and engages with prison's SPO to ensure those prisoners who are more complex from a risk management perspective are appropriately categorised for open conditions prior to transfer to HMP/YOI Thorn Cross. In addition, the introduction of the new digital categorisation service will help to further improve the quality of these categorisation considerations.

Healthcare Needs

It is acknowledged that this is a complex area as health requirements are individual to the prisoner and prisons have a duty of care at the point with which the prisoner presents with the health concern. It should be noted that prisons have to be cautious holding back a prisoner from progressing to open conditions due to a medical condition, as it is possible that a prisoner may seek to legally challenge this decision. In addition, some prisoners would prefer to attend outside hospital appointments un-cuffed and without the full prison officer escort as required in closed conditions. However, it is encouraging that the Board has recognised that the quality of the healthcare provision at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is good and that the on-site team is able to manage most healthcare needs.

Prisoners' Property

It is unfortunate and regrettable that prisoners' property continues to be an issue. The development of the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework involved a large project undertaken in summer 2019. Following the conclusion of the project, HMPPS has worked closely with stakeholders to consult on the proposed policy changes to the policy. Discussions ahead of consultation with IMB members began with the IMB Secretariat in late February 2020, who proposed meetings take place with Board members in April. In light of the pressures placed on Board's by Covid-19, HMPPS agreed with the IMB Secretariat to pause this consultation until August and September. This work is now moving forward again and the feedback received from IMB members at these meetings will then be considered alongside the comments received earlier this year from other stakeholders, with the intention that the draft policy framework will be circulated for wider consultation at the end of 2020.

The new Prisoner Escort and Custody Service 4 Generation contract also began during August 2020 with a new fleet of vehicles which allows for an additional half box of consumable items to the limit of 7.5kg to be carried for each prisoner on top of the existing agreed volumetric limits. In addition to this, HMPPS is looking at what more can be done to encourage prisoners to send out or dispose of excess items to reduce the amount of property that cannot transfer with them. Steps are also being taken to ensure there is a consistent approach when prison staff forward on any excess items to prisoners at their new establishment after a transfer has taken place.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Prisoners (BAME)

It is recognised that the Board has highlighted concern for BAME prisoners that feel they are treated with more suspicion than white prisoners. HMPPS remains committed to ensuring fairness and equal treatment for all and locally at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross, the Deputy Governor has been working with the equalities representatives and BAME prisoners to ensure equality impact assessments are completed for each Exceptional Delivery Model. This approach has been well received by prisoners and the actions from these assessments will be managed through the equalities action plan and the Deputy Governor's bilateral meetings allowing the Board to monitor the evidence during the next reporting year that progress is being made to ensure equal treatment.