



Ministry
of Justice

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister of State for Justice and
Minister for Afghan Resettlement

██████████
Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Thorn Cross
Arley Road
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Dear ██████████

**HMP/YOI THORN CROSS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2020 – 30 APRIL 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2021. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as you continued to operate with a reduced complement of members during an unprecedented and challenging reporting year.

I understand the Board's concerns about capacity in the open estate. In recent months HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has taken a number of units out of use that no longer meet current fire safety standards. This has inevitably had an impact on the availability of Category D (open) places across the estate. In the short term, these reductions in places are being offset by installation of good-quality temporary units at a number of critical sites while HMPPS plan for their replacement on a permanent basis.

We have committed more than £4 billion to make significant progress in delivering 18,000 additional prison places across England and Wales by the mid-2020s, and expansion of the Category D estate is included in this. We are currently assessing which sites may be suitable for expansion. Additionally, the Model for Operational Delivery for Resettlement prisons covers resettlement for both Category C and Category D prisoners to ensure there is equality in service delivery regardless of where they are located within the estate. As such, Category C resettlement prisons are able to provide prisoners with a range of opportunities for rehabilitation and resettlement while they are waiting for an open prison place to become available.

Turning to prisoners with more complex needs, and particularly prisoners serving Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP), HMPPS remains committed to doing all it can to support their progression and efforts to reduce their risk to the point where the Parole Board determines that they may be safely released. This commitment is by means of a bespoke and regularly refreshed action plan between HMPPS and the Parole Board. This includes the psychology work stream consultancy/case file reviews (CFRs) and is applied to all IPP prisoners in custody that have failed to make any progress after two or more post-tariff parole hearings. This cohort has been expanded to include all short tariff prisoners (less than two years), irrespective of previous hearing outcomes. These reviews reinvigorate cases that are not progressing and, where necessary, with consultation, practitioners agree and identify appropriate individual progression pathways. HMPPS also continues to monitor Progression Regimes at four prisons

across the country that are dedicated to progressing indeterminate prisoners struggling to achieve release via the usual routes.

Regarding the number of Approved Premises, in 2019 we made a commitment to deliver 200 additional bed spaces and so far ■ additional bed spaces have been delivered nationally. Alongside this commitment, HMPPS is developing further expansion plans of the current estate together with new sites. Currently HMPPS has successfully secured planning permission for a further 40 bed spaces in addition to the ■ already delivered, which includes sites in the North West such as St Josephs. HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is in regular contact with Approved Premises, the Central Referral Unit, and community Probation teams to request availability at the earliest opportunity though prisoners specifying particular areas can result in longer waiting times for available places.

Although this has been a challenging reporting period, it was encouraging to receive your comments that the prompt action by staff and the cooperation of prisoners meant that the Covid-19 outbreak was contained and short lived, and HMP/YOI Thorn Cross continues to be a very safe establishment with very good staff-prisoner relationships. I was also pleased to note that the popular Railtrack course is due to restart, that Remade with Hope (recycling goods from a major retailer) continues to be a popular job that encourages good teamwork and a positive work ethos, and the excellent work of the farms and gardens workers that keeps the grounds of the prison bright and attractive and allows them to see their hard work come to fruition.

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 ever,



VICTORIA ATKINS MP

HMP/YOI THORN CROSS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 MAY 2020 – 30 APRIL 2021

HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Mobile Phone Usage

HMPPS, the Governor and Prison Group Director are continuing to communicate with key national stakeholders regarding the feasibility of retaining mobile phone virtual visits as a permanent service at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross. In April 2020, in light of Covid mitigations, there were two separate mobile phone projects initially running: An open unmonitored system used within the open estate and a BT pin-based/monitored system used within the closed/open/temporary accommodation prisons. This is formally known as the Temporary Mobile Pin Phone (TMPP) project and this work is still ongoing.

It should be noted however that whilst monitored mobiles have worked well, there are limitations and issues with using these telephones such as monitoring/tampering/signal, and therefore in-cell or telephones on the landings is the preferred option. Across the prison estate, BT mobile phones are gradually being withdrawn as demand reduces and alternative access to telephones is made available.

Sentence Progression

Following a review of Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 40/2011 Categorisation and Re-categorisation in 2018/19, a new Security Categorisation Policy Framework was implemented across the male estate in February 2020, and a subsequent revision published in May 2021. The new Policy Framework was supported with the introduction of a Digital Categorisation Service (DCS), an online tool which allows staff to take account of risk factors and individual's security needs before recording a categorisation decision. All categorisation decisions remain the responsibility of the sending establishment, and the DCS merely ensures all relevant information is considered in the decision-making process. It is recognised that the transition from the closed estate to open estate can be difficult for some prisoners and support to manage the handover process is specific to receiving and sending prisons, as well to the individuals in question. The implementation of any measures therefore is best considered at a local level. Learning and practices around mitigating potential risk factors within Category D prisons have been shared with the open estate and are best utilised in conjunction with local knowledge.

The Governor agrees that a smooth transition to open conditions assists prisoners' readiness to make the most of the rehabilitative environment at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross. Therefore the following measures have been taken: induction procedures have been reviewed and redeveloped to ensure risks and needs are explored and addressed immediately upon arrival; the peer mentor programme has been revised to ensure increased access and support is available throughout this key transition phase; a review of the induction custody care record has improved the identification and communication of risks and needs between key stakeholders; and the prison is in the process of introducing a handover system between the Prison Offender Managers (POMs) from the sending establishment and HMP/YOI Thorn Cross. The National Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) team is also developing training packages/guidance for POM's and Keyworkers in the closed estate to assist in motivating and preparing prisoners for transition to open conditions.

Fire Safety

HMPPS' Public Sector Prison Industries teams produce a safer in-cell plastic tub chair, which is in use across the estate. We have recently been working on a redesign and a prototype has been developed, which is hoped will be progressed to production [REDACTED] This redesigned product will not replace the existing chairs but will be offered as an alternative.

Due to the limitations of suitable alternatives, the current plastic tub chairs at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross are the only chairs on offer at the prison, they are however safe for use within the rooms throughout the prison. The Governor and Prison Group Director welcome the review by Public Sector Prison Industries and have indicated that they will consider replacing the existing stock when an alternative is made available.

Prisoners' Property

Further to last years' response, there was a pause in the development of the new Prisoners' Property policy framework due to COVID-19. The framework will provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis and has been designed with procedural justice at its core. It strengthens guidance on known problem areas such as volumetric control and seeks to ensure prisoners' property is managed efficiently, effectively, consistently and with care and respect. HMPPS has now circulated the draft framework with internal and external stakeholders, including the IMB Secretariat and the IMB representatives previously consulted, and the large number of comments received are being considered. As a result, the framework is now expected to be published early next year.

IT Systems

The Prison Technology Transformation Programme (PTTP) is currently underway to replace the existing prison computer system (Quantum) with the new platform known as MoJ Official. This is an upgrade of both hardware and software. MoJ Official has already been delivered to most non-prison based staff and deployment to operational prison settings started in August 2021. The PTTP is currently in phase 2 with deployment to an early adopter prison. Phase 3 of the programme will see roll out to the wider estate. HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is currently in the second cohort of phase 3 and deployment is due to commence in April 2022.