



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

**For reporting year
1 May 2021 – 30 April 2022**

Published July 2022



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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 430. The prisoners are housed in eight units for category D prisoners nearing the end of their sentence; this also includes life-sentenced prisoners, 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 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, previously called 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 GEOAmey 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. Unsurprisingly, this reporting year has seen the management of the pandemic dominating the work of the prison. Positive cases have been reported throughout most of the year, with 13 being the highest number amongst the prisoners at any one time. The prison has managed these cases well, ensuring that all prisoners could have as near a normal regime as possible. Level 1 (the least restrictive level of the Prison Service's Covid regime management) has been achieved but wisely the prison has reintroduced the normal regime gradually to avoid slipping back.

3.1.2. A major challenge this year has been the level of staff absence, not all of which has been Covid related. The Acting Governor has managed this proactively and the level of absence has been gradually falling. Missing staff inevitably increased the workload of the staff who were in work, which for part of the year also affected morale. Support for staff is available from a variety of sources, which are widely advertised by way of posters, email reminders and the regular employee newsletter. As absence reduced it was possible to increase the minimum number of staff for each shift.

3.1.3. This year has again seen a number of staffing changes. The Governor has been on a secondment to another prison and shortly after arriving back he left to start another secondment. There have also been some vacancies in a variety of roles, which are now starting to be filled.

3.1.4. The level of absconds has increased from 12 to 17 in comparison with 2020-21. Although this is lower than the 22 in 2019-20. Each abscond is thoroughly investigated to see if any lessons can be learned. This has been subject to external review by the Prison Service, the results of which are not known at the time of writing.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

Thorn Cross is a safe establishment where incidents of violence and bullying continue to be rare. The rise in absconds is being managed robustly with a clear action plan. The strong security objective to disrupt and deter drug trafficking and supply has had an impact this year.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

The men are treated well. The staff know the men and are able to respond to their needs. The accommodation is of a good standard. Staff are visible through the estate. The relationships between the staff and the prisoners are good. The regime is courteous, respectful and good humoured.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

The healthcare services are good with services reflecting or bettering those in the community. Healthcare needs are well assessed and the range of clinics offered is impressive. The dedicated mental health service is providing an invaluable service and is appreciated by the prisoners.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Thorn Cross has a rehabilitative culture, which permeates all areas of the establishment. There is positive partnership working with outside agencies and employers. Provision is bespoke.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

3.3.1. To ensure that the prison budget keeps pace with the inflationary pressures, which are now being felt (5.1.5).

3.3.2. To ensure that the ministerial oversight of high risk prisoners transferring to the open estate does not cause undue delay (4.0.6).

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

3.3.3. To resolve the continuing issues with the transfer of property so that less of it goes missing and when it does there is a swift remedy (5.8.1).

3.3.4. To continue the controlled use of mobile phones, as it maintains family ties and so aids rehabilitation (7.4.2).

3.3.5. To provide decent fire retardant seating consistent with the ethos of the open estate (5.1.2).

3.3.6. To ensure that sending prisons complete records fully (6.6.7) (4.0.2).

TO THE GOVERNOR

3.3.7. To continue to pursue initiatives that will reduce the number of absconds (4.0.4) (4.0.5).

3.3.8. To extend the number of areas of prison activity that are analysed in terms of protected characteristics (5.4.1) (5.4.2).

3.3.9. To increase mandatory drug testing to at least pre-pandemic levels (4.5.5).

3.3.10. To train members of the Prison Council so that they are better equipped to fulfil their role (5.3.4).

3.3.11. To ensure that the infrastructure is such that it can manage any increase in number (4.1.1) (4.2.3) (6.1.6) (7.2.2).

3.3.12. To learn from the experiences of the recent introduction of extra accommodation, resulting in better planning and implementation of any future new accommodation (5.1.1).

3.4 Progress since the last report

Issue raised previously	Progress since previous report
Increase in the number of open prison places nationally	There has been no increase in places but an increase is planned for 2023
Adequate resources to meet the needs of more complex prisoners	New working arrangements have enabled more resources to be put into supporting prisoners with more complex needs
Lack of approved premises	By the end of the reporting year, places were available as required
Continued authorised use of mobile phones	The use of mobile phones has been suspended pending a review of staffing
Review of arrangements that allow for prisoners to transfer directly from a high security setting	The transfer of high security prisoners now requires more liaison between the sending prison and Thorn Cross and will be subject to prison offender manager approval
Provision of decent fire retardant seating for prisoners' rooms	A wider range of seating is now available but has not yet been bought
Property being lost during transfer	This is a service wide issue and a review into how the prison manages this continues
Upgrade of IT systems	This is due to take place in June 2022 resulting in a more efficient and reliable systems
Impact of OMiC staffing model	Staff have adjusted well to the new structure and outcomes for prisoners have improved, particularly from the increase in probation staff
Reduction in the amount of contraband brought into the estate by intruders	Improved perimeter security and changed shift patterns has brought

	about a significant reduction in the amount of contraband brought in
Re assessment of methods used to identify prisoners who are at risk of absconding so number of absconds continues to fall	Each abscond is carefully investigated and an abscond strategy has been developed. However, the number of absconds increased this reporting year.
Maintenance of virtual and in person visits	In person visits have become more frequent during the year and are preferred over virtual visits, which have consequently declined
Diversity and Equality Action Team meeting regularly and provision of data on all aspects of the prison's work	Monitoring of protected characteristics across all aspects of the prison's work has not happened and DEAT meetings are not held at least quarterly
Provision of regular complaints monitoring information	Lack of staffing has meant that although data is more frequently provided it is still sometimes incomplete

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.0.1. There has been a clear management focus on both the risks and challenges the pandemic period has presented and also the impact of re-categorisation of prisoners.

4.0.2. Men are being received straight from the closed estate. Having been locked up for 22 hours a day, they have not been able to be fully appraised for their suitability for open conditions. Some were not suitable and chose to abscond, sometimes after only being at the prison for a very short time and some, almost unbelievably, having absconded/escaped before, including one prisoner who had done so from Thorn Cross. There has sometimes been a lack of information shared by the sending prison, which on one occasion resulted in a totally blind prisoner arriving who was not expected.

4.0.3. The increase this year in the number of absconds (17 in total, compared to 12 in the previous reporting year) and the number of prisoners returned to closed conditions, alongside the number of prisoner adjudications, gives rise to the question of why men unsuitable for open conditions have been sent to Thorn Cross. There is no one set of factors which causes a prisoner to abscond. As with other areas of prison life, staff need to adopt a bespoke approach in dealing with men who may be at risk of absconding.

4.0.4. The prison has a clear action plan to reduce the number of absconds, which includes improving the sharing of information between prison offender managers prior to transfer, more involvement of peer mentors in induction, and visits to closed prisons to give prisoners in those establishments a more realistic picture of life at Thorn Cross. An abscond reduction working group has been created to coordinate and oversee this work. The management of absconds has been subject to an external review by the Prison Service, the results of which are still awaited.

4.0.5. The rise in absconds in early 2021 had been compounded by a lack of probation staff, which meant that the prison could not ensure the needs of high risk prisoners arriving at Thorn Cross could be met.

4.0.6. The prison stopped taking high risk prisoners between July and November as it felt it did not have the resources to adequately support those men and in recognition that an increase in the number of high risk prisoners as a proportion of the population as a whole was having an unsettling effect. A further pause was introduced for three months, beginning in March 2022, to allow for stability.

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1. During the reporting year, as Covid restrictions have gradually relaxed and fire safety improvements have been completed, the number and frequency of new prisoners arriving at the prison has been steadily increasing towards the new operational capacity. This has created population challenges, as the prison infrastructure adapts to manage rising numbers. The Board will continue to monitor the impact of this.

4.1.2. The majority of the reporting year saw Covid restrictions continue to varying degrees, with the reverse cohorting unit (RCU) still accepting prisoners directly from

other establishments rather than through the small reception unit. This supported infection control and was highlighted as an example of positive practice in the HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) short scrutiny visit, April 2021.

4.1.3. The planned implementation of a new-style induction process was halted by Covid, but is now in place. The process is more thorough and structured. On arrival, prisoners are placed in first night accommodation for their initial few days. This unit is smaller than other units and prisoners spend up to five days there, allowing them to adapt to open conditions. It also gives staff the opportunity to set out the regime and what the new prisoners can expect, as sometimes the prisoners can have unrealistic expectations of the prison. Each prisoner is seen individually twice and this provides an opportunity to identify vulnerable prisoners, enabling appropriate support to be put in place. This is in addition to healthcare screening.

4.1.4. After their first few days, the prisoners transfer from the first night accommodation onto the main induction unit, where they can stay for anything up to 12 weeks, but often much less. It is well suited for this as rooms are spacious, although most are double occupancy. There is close monitoring of their progress as they adjust to a very different regime. The prisoners follow a programme of induction meetings so that they become familiar with all areas of the prison. This whole process, from the moment they arrive, is supported by peer mentors.

4.1.5. Prisoners coming directly from the closed estate sometimes struggle with dual occupancy but are generally appreciative of the spacious rooms. Prisoners spoken to have been generally positive about their induction experience, describing it as well organised and thorough. They have been able to identify the opportunities that are available to them.

4.1.6. During the pandemic, there have been few, if any, opportunities for the Board to meet with new cohorts on arrival. In order to raise the profile of the IMB, the Board has recently produced a short information booklet about the role of the IMB which prisoners can find in the first night centre'. An IMB information booklet has also been produced for staff, so they are better placed to answer queries from the prisoners.

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.

Period	May 2019 – April 2020	May 2020 – April 2021	May 2021 – April 2022
No. of self-inflicted deaths	0	0	0
No. of self-harm incidents	0	3	1
No. of deaths in custody	1	0	0
No. of ACCTs opened	4	6	1

4.2.2. Since last April, and despite the pandemic, only one incident of self-harm has occurred. This did not require a trip to hospital and occurred whilst the prisoner was under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

4.2.3. So that additional support can be offered, staff continue to identify 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. A number of staff were trained last year in using the latest version of the ACCT documentation (ACCT 6) but, despite this training having been identified as a priority for all staff and the pandemic easing, no new staff have been trained since (currently 79% of operational staff are trained). The impact of this on provision will need to be monitored as the population increases and prisoners with more complex needs continue to arrive at the prison. 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.

4.2.4. There continues to be a strong culture of support for the prisoners at Thorn Cross. Observations and conversations with men suggest that they are happy to approach staff across the estate if they need help. The majority know where to turn to, for example from chaplaincy, activities, gym and wing staff as well as peer support (the peer mentor office reopened in April of this year), and through family contact. On units, officers remain visible and residential managers have their offices situated within units to enhance this visibility.

4.2.5 Sources of support and advice for prisoners include: Listeners (whose details are clearly displayed on all units), peer mentors, (who support induction and offer drop-in sessions at the peer mentor office) and a direct telephone line to the Samaritans, which is widely advertised and displayed around PIN phone areas. There is a safer custody answer phone available to families. This is advertised in the visits hall and is also available via the Partners of Prisoners (POPS) website. Safer custody works closely with mental health services and CGL and operate 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 and serious incidents remain rare. However, this reporting year has seen a relative spike in serious incidents, with three night time incidents occurring in September 2021, November 2021 and more recently in March 2022. A number of staff remained off sick for some time after the initial incident in September, which had an impact on broader staffing. There was a rigorous evaluation of the staff response to the initial incident. Rather than blame being apportioned, the aim was to identify where lessons could be learnt and improvements made to procedures/training. As a result of this, the response to the most recent incident was better managed and well supported by the increased use of body worn cameras.

Period	May 2019 – April 2020	May 2020 – April 2021	May 2021 – April 2022
No. of incidents of bullying	1	0	0
No. self-isolating for own protection	0	0	0
No. of assaults on prisoners	3	7	1
No. of assaults on staff	3	1	3

4.3.2. In the months following on from the first serious incident, some staff reported feeling less safe, particularly working at nights. Night staffing detail was reviewed and there has been a drive to build staff confidence and skills through training, so that they feel better able to manage future incidents. A phone intercom system has also been installed across the estate, which has brought the prison in line with other category D institutions and enhanced staff communications, particularly at night. Senior managers and governors remain mindful of being seen out and about on the prison estate. Despite the isolated incidents, the atmosphere in and around the prison estate has invariably felt safe, relaxed and respectful.

4.3.3. Body worn video cameras were introduced this year, and take-up has been good. Regular guidance and encouragement to use them has repeatedly been issued. There is an expectation that all operational staff will soon wear them.

4.3.4. Covid restrictions and staffing challenges have made it difficult for the prison to undertake simulation exercises for the majority of this reporting year. Two live exercises were carried out at the beginning of the reporting year (fire evacuation and a hostage simulation). There is an intention to continue to roll out further contingency exercises through the year. 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, two staff members have enrolled on the hostage negotiator course. This is clearly of benefit, as the prison will not be reliant on staff from other institutions, who would not have the same degree of knowledge, familiarity and understanding of the prison, its regime and prisoners.

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1. Compared to the previous reporting year, this year has seen a significant increase in use of force. It is acknowledged that last year's low figures most likely represented the impact of lock-downs on movement of prisoners between different establishments and within Thorn Cross.

Period	May 2019 – April 2020	May 2020 – April 2021	May 2021 – April 2022
Total number of use of force incidents	34	5	51
Number of uses to prevent abscond during escort	30	5	48
Number of uses due to non-compliance by a prisoner	4	0	3

4.4.2. There has been a focus nationally on the reporting of rigid cuff use as a use of force incident. Thorn Cross currently uses non-rigid ratchet cuffs, but is expecting to move to rigid cuffs at some point in 2022. Dynamic risk assessments are used to ensure the use of cuffs is necessary and proportionate, and, even though ratchet cuffs are not rigid, detailed reporting and logging of all cuffing incidents is undertaken by the prison's security team.

4.4.3. Monthly segregation monitoring and review group (SMARG) meetings monitor their use and control and restraint staff undertake yearly refresher courses. These were paper-based during Covid restrictions, but are now returning to classroom based lessons. There is a drive to increase the number of staff trained in control and restraint. Currently 64% are trained; the target is to reach 80%.

4.5 Preventing Illicit Items

4.5.1. Drug finds/drop-offs have fluctuated throughout the year. Disrupting and deterring drug trafficking and supply has continued to be a security objective, with security relying on intelligence reports (IRs) and intelligence flow from staff. The quality of IRs has come under internal scrutiny, with guidance on improving submissions being issued to staff via security briefings.

4.5.2. Managing the security of estate boundaries remains a continual challenge. The number of unauthorised drop-offs has reduced significantly. The reinstating of release on temporary licence (ROTL) and extra night patrols (including the use of the north west area search team and the use of patrol dogs in prime times for intruders) has been of benefit. A named police liaison officer for intruders and trafficking has been allocated to the prison. The prison also has a police community officer for promoting good community relations.

4.5.3. Change Grow Live (CGL), based in healthcare, works with around a third of the population, with a team of staff and peer mentors helping them with their addiction problems. CGL links in with security and the offender management unit (OMU) as necessary to support prisoners.

4.5.4. The most commonly used drug continues to be cannabis (31 positive results), followed by opiates (15 positive results) and pregabalin (8 positive results); however in recent months, results have indicated alcohol and cocaine use is on the rise.

4.5.5. Regular mandatory drug testing (MDT) was reduced as Covid restrictions continued to impact on regimes and staffing levels, but five additional staff members

have been trained this year in MDT and full testing is now back. This is reflected in the increase in testing compared to the last reporting year. However, numbers remained lower than pre-pandemic levels and there should be a concerted effort to increase drug testing.

MDT	Number of tests 2021/22 (Numbers in brackets are 2020/21 figures) <i>(Numbers in italic brackets are 2019/20 figures)</i>	Number of positives 2021/22 (Numbers in brackets are 2020/21 figures)
Random tests	141 (36) (419)	38 (4)
Suspicion tests	13 (14) (37)	9 (10)
Risk tests	13 (6) (36)	5 (1)
Test totals	167 (56) (492)	52 (15)

4.5.6. Thorn Cross continues to be a pilot scheme for mouth swab testing. These tests have the benefit of being quick, less intrusive and giving immediate results. Alongside MDT testing, swab testing assists the prison in understanding what type of drugs are being used and their prevalence as well as informing risk related decisions, particularly with regard to ROTL.

4.5.7. Prisoners have commented that they feel swab tests are unfair as they are aware that ROTL boards will consider the results of swab tests. They have been reassured that a positive test will not result in being placed on report or returned to closed conditions for a first negative result; instead a referral to CGL will be triggered. To avoid a sanction, prisoners will be given 28 days to show engagement with and commitment to the support offered. Conversely, evidence of negative tests may be used to support prisoners with their sentence planning and applying for jobs.

4.5.8. As the pandemic has subsided, the security governor has reintroduced a strict adherence to the National Policy Framework for all prisoners. This has affected catalogue ordering, the delivery of family parcels and adherence to the facilities list.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1. The operational capacity of the prison has increased from 385 to 430. Work to make the area around the pods (unit 8), which were installed last year, has continued throughout the year with the provision of covered walkways and a new servery. These improvements have taken far too long and at the time of writing the staff office accommodation remains unsatisfactory, although a new office is finally being installed. Much can be learnt from the installation of this increased accommodation that needs to be put into practice if the plans for further similar accommodation happen.

5.1.2. The fire renovation project is now complete and what could have caused major disruption was well managed. The units required a concerted effort to bring them up to the standard of cleanliness required. One unit was brought back into service before a deep clean could be carried out and cleanliness was an issue for some time. Decent fire retardant seating consistent with the ethos of the open estate is still not available. The plastic tubs provided are those found in the closed estate; they look unsightly, are uncomfortable and although they may suit a prison cell, they do not suit the rooms the prisoners have at Thorn Cross.

5.1.3. There are large and airy association areas on most of the units. Most of the equipment from the kitchen areas had to be removed as the areas did not meet current fire standards. Whilst recognising the prison does not provide independent living, the opportunity for those who wish to cook for themselves should not be lost because of its obvious aid to rehabilitation.

5.1.4. There are sufficient menu choices available and provision is made for prisoners who have food intolerances or allergies. Food comment books are available on each unit but are rarely used. The use of surveys and food focus groups can help in gaining feedback. There are some men who work outside of the prison who are leaving and/or arriving outside of the usual meal times and although provision is made for them it is far from ideal. Meals cooked for Ramadan were well received in April.

5.1.5. The start of 2022 saw the prison experiencing difficulty sourcing supplies. Some of the replacements were not suitable and on some occasions supplies had to be sought from local supermarkets. The end of the reporting year saw nearly all items increasing in price, leading to significant budgetary pressures as the daily cost per prisoner was not increasing.

5.1.6. Throughout the year there have been many occasions where kitchen equipment has been broken and taken too long to be repaired. An area of the floor near the entrance is uneven following a botched repair and has been a trip hazard for some time.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1. As an open prison, Thorn Cross does not have a traditional segregation unit. There are four rooms at one end of unit 6, separated by a locked door. These rooms are the most cell-like rooms that the prison has. Transfers to other prisons happen in a matter of hours after the decision is made and this arrangement has worked well. The most recent HMIP inspection found that the records detailing the observation of

prisoners who were placed in the segregation cells were inadequate. Action has now been taken and adequate records have been seen by the Board.

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 adjudications, those seen have been conducted fairly and respectfully. There has been an increase in the number of prisoners returned to closed conditions, which is a result of the prison being more risk averse as part of the work to lower the number of absconds.

	2020-21	2021-22
Number of adjudications	266	305
Number of prisoners	124	279
Number of offences	476	102
Number returned to closed prison	41	147

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1. This has been a challenging year for staffing. There has been a high level of absence, both long and short term. Absences inevitably meant more work for those in work and for part of the year there was a noticeable drop in the morale of staff, which impacted on the prisoners. For example, officers were placed on duties where they did not know the men and the men did not know them. This sometimes led to matters raised by the men not being acted on as efficiently as they would usually be. Arrangements for home leave and working outside of the prison sometimes took longer than would usually be the case. Staffing absences fell during 2022 following proactive management by the Acting Governor.

5.3.2. The atmosphere is purposeful and focussed. The men are treated with dignity and respect by the staff, frequently with good humour. Some men became frustrated when they had to remain on their units because they were not vaccinated and someone on the unit had tested positive for Covid. This arrangement mirrored measures in place at the time in the community. Staff on the units and in the health centre handled this situation well and when it occurred again the men more readily accepted the situation.

5.3.3. The offender management in custody (OMiC) model of staffing has been implemented during the reporting year. The main impact has been an increase in the number of custodial managers (CMs). These CMs have clear roles, all of which contribute to the rehabilitation and resettlement of the prisoners. This change has seen many new appointments, with existing CMs taking on new roles and additional responsibility. The staff involved have adjusted to these new roles with enthusiasm and energy.

5.3.4. The Prison Council continues to be a useful conduit for information and concerns. Its meetings have become more ad hoc of late and are prone to last minute changes. This has led to some representatives not attending, sometimes

nearly half. The men who serve on the Prison Council may benefit from some training and support so that they are better able to fulfil their role so that they spend more time discussing the concerns of the prison body as a whole, rather than issues pertaining to just their own unit or themselves.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1. There is some systematic analysis of prison data in terms of relevant protected characteristics, which compares the prison to similar establishments. Comparison with similar establishments is useful when measuring performance, however it only tells part of the story. For example, the comparative data shows that the number of minority ethnic men who are on the enhanced incentives scheme level is in line with similar establishments. However, it does not show whether minority ethnic prisoners are under or over represented in the total who are on the enhanced incentives scheme level at Thorn Cross.

5.4.2. The number of prisoners who work in the community is not analysed by ethnicity. This is the same for the prisoners returned to closed conditions or who have adjudications, or random MDT tests. Therefore, it is not possible to say whether unconscious bias or racial profiling is happening. It is also not possible to obtain historical data to show the percentage of the prison population who are from minority ethnic communities at the beginning and end of our reporting year. Collection of such data would enable the prison to track the changing nature of its population and take such action as necessary to meet the needs of a changing population. Similarly, data in terms of prisoners with other protected characteristics is not collected across all areas of the prison's activities.

5.4.3. There has been a lack of clarity as to who is responsible for diversity and equality work. The diversity and equality action team has met infrequently during the reporting year, having only met twice in the previous year. Although understandable because of staffing and pandemic pressures, it is nevertheless concerning. The Acting Governor has stated that there is to be a renewed focus on equalities.

5.4.4. Some focus groups for prisoners from minority ethnic backgrounds, older prisoners and those from a Traveller background have taken place, but they are ad hoc.

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

5.4.6. There are events to mark different religious festivals or events 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. Some of this work had a lower profile this reporting year due to the pandemic.

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 irrespective of faith. Understandably the services and other activities the chaplaincy provides (such as 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. However, the pandemic prevented this for much of the reporting year. The kitchen provides meals that ensure that the religious needs of the prisoners are met.

5.5.3. The chaplaincy has had a spring clean, with new furniture in the chapel and redecoration. It is a bright, attractive area of the prison offering valued support for the prisoners.

5.6 Incentives schemes

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.

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.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1. Most months, the Board receives an analysis of the number and nature of complaints. There were 214 complaints in the reporting year. We also randomly sample some of the replies to see if they are answered in a way that is appropriate to the prisoner, remembering that some prisoners have low literacy levels. Generally they are, but care still needs to be taken to avoid jargon and 'management speak'.

5.7.2. One residential unit submitted twice as many complaints as the others. This unit had been the one most impacted by Covid restrictions, as well as being the one where a significant amount of contraband was brought into the estate and where there were some instances of poor discipline. The link between these is clear.

5.7.3. A dedicated staff member coordinates the complaints system and proactively chases up late responses, including those to other establishments.

5.8 Property

5.8.1. Missing property continues to be problematic. Although most prisoners do not lose their property on transfer, the minority who do can face many months before being reunited with their belongings. This is unsatisfactory.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1.1. The quality of healthcare continues to be good, as evidenced by the very small number of complaints received (four between December 2020 and March 2021). Of the prisoners surveyed as part of the HMIP short scrutiny visit (April 2021), 79% said that the overall quality of health services was good. The scrutiny visit described the healthcare service as 'well led' and responsive to patient's needs. This would support our own observations.

6.1.2. The prison was classed as an outbreak site in June 2021 and again in January 2022. With support and guidance from Public Health England, the outbreak was successfully contained. Services were well prepared to manage contagious diseases, with mass testing on units undertaken, enhanced reception screening, social distancing and cohorting measures put in place and personal protective equipment used.

6.1.3. The Covid vaccination programme has continued to broadly mirror the service found in the outside community. Currently 220 men have had all three vaccinations. Refusers were managed proactively with good engagement both directly and through patient forums. Subsequently vaccine uptake has steadily improved. Approximately a third of the population have refused all vaccinations.

6.1.4. The Quality Framework submission for patient safety, quality and performance was graded positively in November and is next due in June. Blood pressure monitoring and the referral process remains a focal point. Primary and secondary health screening of new prisoners are again separated by at least 24 hours to enable more informative assessment. Protocols to improve communications between the ambulance service and gate staff continue. A prisoner suffered a heart attack in July and prompt action and effective communications by staff was considered life-saving.

6.1.5. As the prison population has increased, healthcare staffing has continued to be below full capacity for most of the year. It has been acknowledged by management that a resources review is required to meet the needs of the increasing population. Shift changes to enable evening clinics are being considered, which would better serve both prisoners who work outside the prison and also new intakes arriving in the late afternoon.

6.1.6. GP clinics have been maintained for the majority of the year. During pandemic peaks, GPs have visited units and nurses and mental health providers have maintained active contact with the prisoners. Unless urgent, the current waiting time for a GP face to face appointment is two weeks, but this is decreasing. This is significantly longer than a year ago and is due to the increase in the number of prisoners. It is worth noting, however, that prisoners responding to the ABL health service survey (December 2021) described waiting times for mental health services as 'really short', typically around 48 hours.

6.1.7. Levels of non-attendance at appointments (DNAs) continue to be high. Practitioners recognise the challenges prisoners can face in attending and are proactive in engaging with DNA patients. In December there was a total of 117 DNAs and in April a total of 170 DNAs.

6.2 Physical health

6.2.1. Smart Dental is the prison's dental service provider and is doing well. Dentistry clinics are well used, with clinics now running three days a week to meet demand. Dental aerosol generated treatment was re-started in January 2022 broadly in line with the community. Inroads are being made into the waiting list for patients requiring this treatment. A dental hygienist holds a weekly clinic, which is popular.

6.2.2. As the restrictions ease, all other routine in-house specialist clinics are now back up and running at full capacity and well reflect services available in the wider community. These include a comprehensive screening offering of abdominal, aortic and aneurysm (AAA) screenings for over 65s, retinol eye screening for diabetics and bowel screening for over 60s as well as X-ray and ultrasound services.

6.2.3. Medicines management meetings are held quarterly in partnership with HMP Risley, rather than on a wider regional basis. These meetings are attended by the lead pharmacist. Through partnership with Risley, the pharmacy service continues to benefit from professional oversight and improved staffing. There are six pharmacy staff, including one pharmacy technician based on-site at Thorn Cross who attends all reception screenings to support new prisoners' medication needs. Patients contributing to the ABL health survey (2021) stated minimal delays in receipt of medications on arrival at the prison. Medicines are administered in a safe and confidential manner.

6.2.4. The health and wellbeing mentor scheme is re-launching, with fresh recruitment and training of peer mentors. Direct support for mentors will be provided by Warrington council wellbeing services. The programme was established 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 and mental health, as well as their wellbeing, had declined during Covid-9. The Thorn Cross ABL survey (2021) suggested that the wellbeing mentor service could be better publicised and that mentors needed to be more visible to improve awareness. The primary aim of the scheme continues to be weight management support and the delivery of health improvement messages through fully trained peer mentors, who have developed links with the gym. Smoking cessation clinics have also restarted.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1. A multi-agency approach to mental health and wellbeing was instigated last year in response to concerns previously raised by prisoners about the need for additional support and counselling. This continues to bring benefits. The relocation of associated services into one building has enabled enhanced communication and ensured better management oversight. Mental health practitioners being sited within the prison and effective joint working with other departments is helping to improve prisoner outcomes.

6.3.2. Prisoners interviewed for the ABL health service survey (December 2021) stated they were 'very satisfied' with the mental health provision and were treated with kindness, and that there was equality of access, irrelevant of their characteristics or offence.

6.3.3. They also identified the biggest impact on their mental health as being a lack of employment related to their skills set. The Acting Governor has stated that one of his key objectives for the coming year is to get prisoners into lasting employment, as it is a significant factor in reducing re-offending.

6.3.4. The psychological wellbeing professional (PWP) was appointed on a part time basis last year and is shared with another local prison. Their caseload continues to increase. In addition to individual cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) sessions, group work has recently been introduced covering areas such as anxiety management and managing emotions. The PWP is very visible and proactive, visiting units regularly. A new counselling service has recently commenced ('Manchester Survivors') for patients suffering from trauma. Services are initially being offered two days a week, but are due to increase to three. A new diagnostic tool for PTSD is being developed by GMMH.

6.3.5. A mental health nurse reviews all reception prisoners on arrival and follows up with visits to the induction unit to carry out further assessments. This allows any concerns to be quickly identified and referred to the appropriate support agency/service. All new admissions to the mental health and wellbeing service are triaged by the nurse. Twenty-two prisoners are currently on the combined caseload.

6.3.6. There continues to be a wellbeing unit on the estate. When allocating new vulnerable prisoners to a unit, care is taken to allocate the most appropriate room, not necessarily the first room to become available. Prisoners interviewed for the ABL health survey (December 2021) reported limited additional benefit to wellbeing from living on this unit.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1. There have been three social care referrals this year; two for prisoners with visual impairments and one for a prisoner to be assessed for social care on release. The two prisoners with visual impairments have reported to the IMB high levels of satisfaction with the support they have received at Thorn Cross. Carers have been sourced from prison peers, suitably adapted accommodation has been enabled and press alarms around necks have been provided. The positive experiences of these two prisoners are a reflection of the strong links with the local authority which have endured despite lockdown periods. This has supported the delivery of effective services for the prisoners.

6.5 Exercise, regime

6.5.1. After the restricted access to physical activity during Covid restrictions, the prison's exercise regime was back to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the reporting year. The old gym equipment was in dire need of replacement and the gym has now been refurbished. This continues to be highly popular with the prisoners, with gym competitions, including Cross Fit. Outdoor gym areas have been created.

6.5.2. The sports field is used for various sporting activities, including football matches. Football training with representatives from Wigan Athletic football club

have taken place and they also started a coaching programme for a number of prisoners.

6.5.3. The prison's attractive grounds lend themselves to outside exercise. Prisoners are often to be found walking or running around the estate's circuit during the day. A running club has just been re-started encouraging prisoners to run measured circuits of the estate every Friday. Prisoners are being encouraged to try anything from a couple of circuits to a half marathon.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1. The CGL service was described as 'impressive' in the HMIP scrutiny report (2021). CGL works with around a third of the prison population to ensure the rehabilitation of those with substance and alcohol misuse problems, as well as with the CGL service in the community to ensure continuity of care on release. In March and April 2022, CGL had a caseload of between 100 and 120, which included 51 new referrals.

6.6.2. The service is now back to pre-pandemic levels of service provision, with recovery teams on site, carrying out clinical reviews and with drop-in services and therapeutic groups back up and running.

6.6.3. On average up to seven service users are on clinical programmes at any one time, mainly using Methadone but also Espranor. At the time of writing, six patients were using this service. The service has a high success rate for detoxing, with prisoners overtly encouraged to take ownership of their habit. Prisoners on clinical detox programmes are closely monitored as they maintain, reduce and then hopefully stop their habit, with daily check-ins at the service, and five and 13 week GP reviews in place. CGL can also refer to Narcotics Anonymous.

6.6.4. The main drugs used are cannabis, closely followed by opiates and pregabalin. More recently, alcohol and cocaine use is increasing. Recovery plans continue to be focused on reducing supply.

6.6.5. All CGL and healthcare staff are trained in administration of both injectable and nasal Naloxone, which is used to counter the effects of opioid overdose. Prisoners can request to be trained too, so that they can take Naloxone home with them on release. The provision of Naloxone nasal spray was a notable practice to improve prisoner safety. The Acting Governor is consulting with the Prison Officers Association (POA) to push for all custodial managers to be trained to carry Naloxone, which would further enhance prisoner safety.

6.6.6. CGL provides twice weekly inductions for new prisoners, where harm reduction talks provide information on tolerance levels, relapsing, overdose awareness and harm reduction. Every man undergoes the same talk prior to release. CGL peer mentors support this. Prisoners are being encouraged to become CGL mentors, which is a great opportunity. There are currently two mentors, with one vacancy.

6.6.7. CGL have observed that prisoners are arriving with more complex needs and these are not always being recorded in sufficient detail by the sending establishment.

6.6.8. Full workplace risk assessments are in place and, as the regime has opened up again, more resources have been put in place to test those prisoners leaving and returning from ROTL and work placements.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1. Now that restrictions have eased, all chaplaincy programmes have been re-started, such as the Sycamore Tree victim impact programme, which teaches the principles and application of restorative justice and aims to enable prisoners to understand the impact of their crime on victims, families and the community. Yoga sessions are running and the peer mentoring programme for weight loss is being re-launched. Group therapy sessions on managing anxiety and emotions are a welcome resource, as is the trauma counselling.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1. As Covid restrictions have eased, the education provision has returned to pre-pandemic levels with attendance being very high. The prisoners tend to enjoy their learning and take part willingly. High levels of engagement have been observed.

7.1.2. On arrival the prisoner's 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. Attendance at classes is carefully monitored and followed up. Where there is no reasonable excuse, the prisoner may be dealt with via the prison's disciplinary process as well as losing his place on the course.

7.1.3. Teaching is geared to the world outside of the prison, with everything targeted on increasing employability and therefore aiding resettlement. Staff continue to undertake relevant training so that their teaching is up to date.

7.1.4. The education provision remains highly successful with a variety of courses available, all leading to recognised qualifications at varying levels. There was a 100% pass rate in all but two of the courses offered. Some prisoners are able to follow Open University courses, whilst others attend local colleges to pursue their studies there.

7.1.5. There is an emphasis on functional skills, which is offered in English and mathematics at both level one and two. These qualifications are a requirement before consideration for a work placement in the community can be considered. Although relatively small in number, the number of prisoners entering the prison without these basic skills is significant.

7.1.6. The library is attractive and well stocked with books and DVD resources. It is well used and appreciated by the prisoners. It is situated in the main concourse, which is a much improved area. The vision is to create a campus type environment with a cafe and comfortable seating. It has been decorated and many plants provided. The education classrooms are of a good size and well equipped.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1. The vocational training provision is equally successful, with eleven different courses available, all leading to recognised qualifications in subjects such as; functional skills, IT, food preparation and cooking, customer service, and applied entrepreneurship. NVQ courses are offered at certificate and diploma level. All but two of these courses have a 100% pass rate, which reflects the good teaching they receive.

7.2.2. A new scaffolding course started at the very end of our reporting year with nine prisoners successfully completing the first five day course and finding employment. This course will be offered monthly. Thirty two prisoners have been following a RailTrack course, with some being able to complete live trackside training whilst on ROTL. Many prisoners who complete this course are able to find employment on release. A fork lift truck course has also been offered for the first time this year. Prisoners are also able to take the CSCS card needed for working in the construction industry.

7.2.3. The number of prisoners working in the community is now back to pre-pandemic levels. The long term aim of increasing this number from 70 to 120 remains. This is a positive move and adequate staffing needs to be provided for this to happen. More places will also be needed as the prison population increases. The prisoners work in a variety of roles in the local area as well as in Merseyside or Greater Manchester. They are transported by one of the prison minibuses, use public transport or their own vehicles. A group of local employers meets regularly.

7.2.4. There are a number of places for work at Thorn Cross; Max Spielmann (which now has much improved accommodation), Timpsons and Remade With Hope are all on site. Work is also available in the kitchens, as cleaners, mentors and in farms and gardens. The number of prisoners working at any one time can sometimes fluctuate as prisoners might be on visits or attending an appointment with their offender manager, for example. This can mean that up to 25% of the workforce might be missing and some thought ought to be given to see if the occasions when prisoners are legitimately absent from work can be better coordinated.

7.2.5. The prisoners are able to suggest their own placements, which are carefully vetted as to their suitability. Those responding to the ABL survey (December 2021) stated that the biggest impact on their mental health was the lack of employment related to their skill set. Most prisoners working in the community are in prison sourced placements, some of which are voluntary - in a charity shop, for example. As such, they are able to give something back to the community. There are plans to increase the number of prisoners undertaking voluntary work prior to having paid employment. There have also been opportunities for some prisoners to work in the immediate area on community projects.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1. Staff kept all the necessary risk assessments up to date so that as soon as ROTL could be extended, as pandemic restrictions eased, prisoners were able to undertake home visits and work in the community in greater numbers.

7.3.2. There were a significant number of vacancies at the start of the reporting year, with just two of the six probation officers in post. This had an impact on the service provided for the prisoners and led to a reduction in the number of high risk prisoners that could be accommodated. This meant high risk prisoners were not able to experience the rehabilitative culture provided. More staff have been recruited and probation staff are now working in the establishment for 80% of the time.

7.3.3. 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 and communications. There is a drop in clinic every Friday afternoon where the prisoners can speak to one of the staff. The prisoners who use it usually feel reassured that they are not lost in the system.

7.3.4. The OMU building is unsuitable and, although a replacement has long been promised, it has not yet appeared.

7.3.5. Offending behaviour programmes are expected to be completed by prisoners at closed establishments prior to transfer. 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 is once more available, as are programmes provided through the drug and alcohol service (CGL).

7.3.6. At the end of the reporting year, there were 52 prisoners serving life or IPP sentences, with the number fluctuating throughout the year. These prisoners have additional and often complex needs.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1. The supervised use of mobile phones to contact family members was highly valued by the prisoners. This was introduced as a temporary measure in response to the pandemic and has now been discontinued. It was shown that their use can work and support rehabilitation and the prison should look at ways of reintroducing their use.

7.4.2. We raised the use of mobile phones two years ago and received an entirely negative response from the Minister at that time. Out of necessity, their use was allowed from March 2020 and has continued throughout most of this reporting year with few insurmountable issues. As yet no final decision has been taken as to their continued use, but the genie is firmly out of the bottle and any future restriction will be a backward step. They are a useful aid in maintaining family ties.

7.4.3. Family ROTL has had to have regard to any Covid restrictions that may have been in place in different parts of the UK. Sometimes it has been possible for families to meet in a local park, so although a home visit may not have been possible some family contact was. As restrictions have been removed, home leave is another aspect of prison life that has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

7.4.4. Even though most prisoners are from the north-west, Thorn Cross is a national resource and over the past few months an increasing number of prisoners have been transferred who live some considerable distance away e.g. London and the West Midlands. This creates obvious problems in maintaining family ties; it is too far for families to visit and too far for home leave to take place. The effect on the rehabilitation of these men needs careful monitoring.

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

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1. Discharge boards begin several weeks before release. This involves joint working between the different agencies both within and outside the prison. Prisoners who are due for release report that they have been supported and prepared for release.

7.5.2. Sixteen prisoners during the reporting year were released without accommodation, despite the considerable work the prison did in trying to find some. The provision of approved premises has been variable. Some premises have been very reluctant to accept prisoners again following the relaxation of Covid measures. This has impacted on the ability of some prisoners to take advantage of temporary overnight release.

7.5.3. The employment hub assists the prisoners in finding employment on release by advertising vacancies and helping create CVs. Representatives from the DWP are also available to support benefit claims.

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	184
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line*	0
Total number of segregation reviews attended	0

Applications to the IMB (including via the 0800 telephone line)

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	1	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, IEP, sanctions		
C	Equality		3
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	3	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	1	
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	2	1
F	Food and kitchens		
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	5	1
H1	Property within this establishment	1	
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	5	15
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	1	
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	1	8
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying		4
K	Transfers		
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system		2
	Total number of applications	20	36



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