



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
Stuart Andrew MP
Minister of State for Justice

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

**HMP/YOI THORN CROSS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2021 – 30 APRIL 2022**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2022. I hope my predecessor Victoria Atkins' visit to the prison in May 2022 was helpful. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work, especially as you have had several vacancies.

I appreciate your comments about the prison food budget, particularly given the current inflation. As highlighted by your Board, unfortunately during Covid-19 (2020/2021) we saw food commodities in short supply. This led to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) national food supplier working with them on agreed substitutes where a product was unavailable. If the substitute product was deemed as unsuitable and menu changes could not overcome the shortage, sourcing locally was considered the right decision.

The Board may be aware that Governors have the authority to determine how they spend the overall non-pay budget for their prison. An element which makes up the non-pay budget is food which in 2020-21 was calculated on a formula of £2.12 per prisoner, per day. Governors ultimately use their discretion to determine how much is specifically allocated for food. At the end of the 2021/22 financial year the establishment achieved a daily cost of £2.43 per prisoner, with the comparator group average at £2.33. The Catering team are regularly adapting menus to react to the rise in food prices and availability issues. The Governor will continue to monitor the food allowance regularly and is developing plans to move towards central dining which will help to reduce waste and to operate within the daily food allowance. Prison Rule 24 states that prisoners must be provided with three meals a day, and these should be wholesome, nutritious, well prepared and served, reasonably varied and sufficient in quantity. HMPPS will continue to work with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, as per government guidelines on eating healthy meals.

Regarding high-risk prisoners, as the Board is aware the Governor temporarily paused their transfer due to the shortage of probation officers and a rise in the number of absconds (during a period when the prison was increasing the population size). HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is now fully staffed and is accepting high-risk prisoners. A local abscond strategy is in place to identify potential risks and triggers and support those prisoners who present a risk of absconding. The strategy is regularly reviewed and there is increased scrutiny on re-categorisation within the closed estate. The Governor has enhanced the support

for prisoners who have personal issues or who may be at risk from others and has introduced a dedicated group of staff to provide a higher level of support and supervision to new arrivals. A weekly Teams call has been introduced for prisoners who are due to transfer to HMP/YOI Thorn Cross to help structure expectations. Prison Offender Manager (POM) to POM handovers are in place for high-risk men.

To end, it was encouraging to receive your comments that HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is a safe establishment and fosters a rehabilitative culture with good staff and prisoner relationships. I was pleased to note the excellent work over the course of the pandemic to safely manage the prison and that there were no deaths in custody during the reporting year. Your comments about the education provision, the running club and the positive experiences of two prisoners with visual impairments were pleasing to note.

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.


STUART ANDREW MP

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

Prisoners' Property

The new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework was published on 1 August 2022 with an implementation date of 5 September 2022. The Framework is the result of extensive consultation, including with the IMB. It has been designed with procedural justice at its core and aims to ensure consistency and fairness and enhance prisoners' satisfaction with processes and outcomes. Given the nature of property, and the movement of prisoners between establishments, the Framework looks to provide greater direction and standardisation on a national basis. It strengthens processes in relation to the main problem areas identified by IMBs and staff including the handling of valuable property, managing cell clearances, compliance with volumetric control and forwarding on excess property following a prisoner's transfer.

Using Mobile Phones

HMPPS is currently reviewing access to IT across the open estate which includes access to mobile phones to aid family ties. Revised guidance will be published as part of the new Conveyance Policy Framework once it has received approval. It aims to ensure access is risk based in these very specific prison environments (rather than just applying what is permitted in the closed estate). In the interim, access to mobile phones, as originally introduced in response to the pandemic, may continue at the discretion of the Governor.

Seating Safety Issues

The plastic tub chair was designed for in-cell use across the prison estate with endorsement by the Ministry of Justice Technical Standards and the Health Safety and Fire Group. 'Crib 7' rated, flame retardant seat products are available for the Governor to purchase. Roll out will be staggered and in line with the current prison budget (a bid for additional funding to be submitted).

Prisoner Records

The Governor is working with sending establishments in the closed estate to ensure that men with complex needs are identified before transfer to enable support plans to be put in place for their arrival. Where there are concerns with care plans, handover, or appropriate re-categorisation, these are shared with the Governor of the sending establishment to take action and identify any shared learning. A selection of HMP/YOI Thorn Cross prisoners are taken on visits to sending establishments to discuss the open prison offer with prisoners there (who are potentially due a transfer).