



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Thameside

**For reporting year
1 July 2021 – 30 June 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

HMP Thameside is a privately operated local reception and resettlement category B/C prison for adult male prisoners in south east London. Throughout the reporting year, the prison has been occupied close to its operational capacity of 1,232.

Most prisoners are held in two-bed cells. All cells have integrated toilets and showers, a telephone and an in-cell computer management system (CMS). Prisoners use CMS to request activities including gym, social visits, healthcare appointments, meal options and canteen. Eligible prisoners can pay for access to a limited number of television channels.

The prison has a video-conference centre containing 14 rooms for legal visits, police interviews and court and parole hearings.

The prison also has a well-equipped gym with two outdoor areas, a well-stocked library, an education centre and a multi-faith centre.

The care and separation unit (CSU) has 18 cells, and the healthcare centre runs clinics for outpatients and has an 18-cell inpatient unit.

The prison opened in 2012 and is managed under contract run by Serco Group plc. It has two partner agencies: Catch22 (focusing on offender management, gangs and rehabilitation) and Turning Point (focusing on issues from drug and alcohol misuse). Serco FM, a separate division of Serco plc, provides the facilities management services.

A number of centrally contracted organisations provide other services:

- Healthcare services are provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (Oxleas).
- Change Grow Live (CGL) delivers social care.
- Education provision is contracted to Novus.
- Careers advice provision is contracted to the Forward Trust
- Jobcentre Plus offer job and benefits support.
- Resettlement services are provided by the probation service and St Mungo's who specialise in accommodation services.

The Director

The Governor of a private sector prison is referred to as the 'Director'. He/she is required to be a certificated prison custody officer and is appointed under the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

The Controller

All private sector prisons have a Controller's team, based in the prison. The role of the Controller is to monitor the contract between the Secretary of State for Justice and the private sector operator to ensure compliance. The Controller and members of his/her team have held senior positions in public sector-run prisons prior to appointment.

3. Executive summary

3.1 Background to the report

From the beginning of the reporting year (July 2021), the prison remained in exceptional delivery model (EDM) stage 3 due to the high level of Covid in the community as well as with the high numbers of prisoners in the prison declining vaccination. By October 2021, the prison had successfully moved to stage 2 but was moved back to stage 4 in December by HMPPS due to increased Covid infection rates. By January 2022, it had moved back to stage 3 but by April had progressed again to stage 2. In May 2022, HMPPS stood down Covid-19 Gold Command across the prison estate, thereby releasing all prisons from the requirement to operate within national EDM levels.

Although by reporting year end, the regime for prisoners was beginning to return to some semblance of normality, nevertheless prisoners have continued to endure many restrictions for the majority of this second year of Covid.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspected the prison during November 2021. Where appropriate, reference is made to its findings in this report.

Unlike in 2020, Board members have maintained a full presence in the prison throughout the year. However, for half of the reporting year the Board has had only a third of its complement of Board members. The scope of the Board's monitoring has, therefore, been restricted, and this has also affected the evidence available in finalising some areas of this annual report.

3.2 Main judgements

How safe is the prison?

As in the previous year, the prison management has continued to take effective measures to prevent the spread of Covid.

The Board welcomes the focus placed on managing initiatives such as use of force (UoF) training, assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) documentation and the use of challenge, support and intervention plans (CSIPs). Prisoner on prisoner assaults have increased this year.

The prison makes continued efforts to prevent the import of illicit substances. Although mandatory drug testing (MDT) for prisoners resumed towards the end of the reporting year, the Board has been unable to obtain reliable MDT data from the prison on the extent and nature of drug use, which is a major contributory factor to prison violence.

How fairly and humanely are prisoners treated?

Normal and more humane life for prisoners has slowly returned as Covid restrictions have eased, though severe staffing shortages and the inexperience of newly recruited staff has hindered its pace and extent.

Improvements to accommodation facilities have continued, though the Board is concerned by the reliability of the emergency cell bell answering system and how many calls go unanswered.

Complaints about missing property have risen by 60% this year. The Board sees frequent evidence of lack of care and respect for prisoner property. This causes understandable prisoner frustration and needs urgently addressing.

How well are prisoners' health and wellbeing needs met?

Concerns raised by the Board in the previous reporting year – medication issues, complaints handling – have continued this year and were also highlighted in the HMIP inspection report. The IMB survey on healthcare carried out towards the end of the reporting year showed that overall poor communication with healthcare staff was a major issue for prisoners.

While not the fault of either the healthcare provider or the prison, the Board once again deplores the length of time mentally ill patients must wait for outside transfer to an appropriate secure mental health hospital. This is not humane.

The Board also has concerns regarding the limited access to gym for prisoners due to the continued cross deployment of staff. Full-time workers also have limited or no access to the gym due to their working hours.

How well are prisoners progressed towards successful resettlement?

Unrestricted face-to-face social visits were available towards the end of the reporting year but by year end, family activities had still not returned to their pre-pandemic levels.

The Catch22 team has continued to work hard to secure transfers for life sentenced prisoners and category D prisoners to a more appropriate establishment, despite there being a shortage of places across the prison estate.

However, lack of staffing in the other agencies contracted to provide resettlement services has impacted on the services they can offer. An IMB survey aimed at sentenced prisoners carried out during two weeks in June 2022 showed that this cohort did not feel their needs were being met in relation to education, training, employment, debt, finance and housing. Little or no support for remand prisoners has been available over the reporting year due to the reunification of the probation service.

3.3 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Liaise with NHS England to provide sufficient bed capacity in secure mental health hospitals, in order to avoid the need for prisons to hold mentally ill prisoners longer than the recommended NHS 14-day guideline, a practice which is wholly inhumane.
- Provide sufficient resourcing for the probation service to ensure adequate support to both sentenced and remand prisoners before and after their release.
- Work with other government departments to provide sufficient resources so that prisoners have adequate resettlement support and guidance on release such as housing and employment which is known to reduce recidivism.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- For many years IMBs have raised the continuing problems associated with the transfer of prisoner property. This is due to inefficient processing systems and inadequate and insufficient storage in transfer vehicles across the prison estate. Apart from the distress and frustration this causes prisoners, these losses also lead to expensive but avoidable compensation claims. A national solution is urgently needed to tackle this problem.
- There is a lack of available places within the prison estate to enable reception prisons such as Thameside to transfer category D and prisoners on longer sentences to establishments where their needs will be met more appropriately.
- Better management of the contracts of outside agencies including healthcare, education, housing, resettlement and probation is needed to address the shortcomings in the delivery of these services.

TO THE DIRECTOR

- Improve the system for handling prisoner property, especially within the reception area (see section 5.8).
- More rigorous monitoring and analysis of cell bell data, especially data covering night-time calls, and address the system's unreliability (see section 5.1).
- More focused analysis of the data collected across all departments to inform and improve planning.
- Improve the key worker scheme to ensure that the contact between prisoners and key workers becomes more effective and meaningful (see section 5.3).
- Address Listener call-out issues across the houseblocks (see section 4.2).

3.4 Progress since the last report

Positive developments noted by the Board during the year include:

- The prison continues to be managed overall with greater effectiveness, purpose and openness. This has been assisted by a number of internal promotions at wing manager and assistant director level
- With a high percentage of new staff we note the prison's continued reminders encouraging the submission of intelligence reports (IRs), CSIPs and social responsibility unit (SRU) referrals. (See section 4 Safety.)
- A much improved COMP2 system, including greater transparency in relation to how these are handled, and the timeframe involved. (See 5.7 Complaints.)
- Improvements in the complaint system overall – high percentage answered on time, increased number of considered responses dealing with the issues raised. (See 5.7 Complaints.)
- Use of body worn video cameras (BWVC) – the continued expectation of senior managers that custodial staff activate their BWVCs at the beginning of any incident and that all reports on such incidents include the BWVC reference. (See 4.4 Use of force.)
- The availability of BWVC evidence in the adjudications room. (See 5.2 Adjudications)
- More prompt responsiveness of facilities management to accommodation repairs. (See 5.1 Facilities.)
- CMS system replaced throughout the prison with an improved version. (See 5.1 Facilities.)
- The Prisoners Information and Activity Committee (PIAC) now running more frequently, efficiently and effectively. (See 5.3 Prisoner forum.)
- The Board welcomes the new incentives scheme designed to reinforce the standards of behaviour expected of all prisoners at Thameside and the benefits. This includes a focus on monitoring non-attendance at education and training classes. (See 5.6 Incentives schemes.)
- Whilst progress has been made in addressing shortfalls in UoF training and the use of V6 ACCT documentation, there remains scope for improvement in both areas. (See Section 4 Safety.)

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

The latter half of the reporting year has been characterised by the gradual relaxation of the regime from the Covid lockdown. Whilst this has obviously been welcomed across the prison and has observably led to an improvement in the general mood of both prisoners and staff, it also increased the opportunities for violence and ill-discipline.

With a number of new staff, the opening up of the prison has been managed carefully, allowing the staff to become familiar with the emerging regime. There has been a continuing focus on in-service training around UoF, completion of ACCT documentation, the use of CSIP and the incentives scheme which, whilst generally improving, remain disappointing in some areas.

There has recently been a rationalisation in the number of meetings dealing with safety issues. The weekly safety intervention meeting (SIM) – now incorporating the safeguarding board agenda – is a forum for discussing prisoners of concern, such as those on ACCTs or CSIPs, in the CSU and inpatient unit. A more recently constituted monthly security, drugs and self-harm reduction meeting (taking over from the safer prisons meeting) examines data and trends around self-harm, violence and security issues.

There has been a welcome focus on training staff about the appropriate UoF, and also encouraging the use of CSIPs as a proactive rather than purely reactive intervention.

All acts of self-harm or violence are now graded according to the severity of the harm or assault, with the most serious cases prompting a full investigation.

The prison has a very active psychological services department which has led a number of initiatives, including research into ACCTs, violence and self-harm and developing a 'social climate' measure with the intention of creating action plans on the wings where relevant and necessary. A support scheme is being run with staff in the CSU to help prevent burnout and a social responsibility unit has been established as a way of supporting troubled prisoners out of disruptive behaviours – however, due to staff shortages, the numbers in the unit remain very low.

It would appear that the change in approach to ACCTs noted last year (opening fewer ACCTs so as to focus interventions on the most needy prisoners) is perhaps having the hoped for results in reducing the number of incidents of self-harm, which fell year on year.

Continuous, regular monitoring of the quality of ACCT documentation reveals that there are still some problems with this throughout the prison (see section 4.2).

Whilst the long-term effects of the Covid regime remain hard to assess, it does not immediately appear that it has had any particularly noticeable effect in the short-term.

We are disappointed to note that, whilst the quantity of data collected has improved over the past few years (including comparisons with other London male prisons) we

have observed that it is not always interrogated and translated into meaningful, actionable information.

4.1 Reception and induction

As a reception and resettlement prison, the reception area is unsurprisingly very busy. On a typical morning there can be up to 30 prisoners leaving to attend court and between five and 15 prisoner transfers. New incoming prisoners can number anything between 15 and 30 – this includes licence recalls and transfers in – whilst returning prisoners are usually around 15 to 25 a day.

At the end of the reporting year, late arrivals and processing were occurring about twice a month. Problems with healthcare staff availability can occur during nurses' handover periods in early evening since this removes the nurses from reception during this very busy time. This in turn causes delays in getting primary care checks completed prior to transfer to the early days centre (EDC).

Following a comment in a recent HMIP report that 'the reception area was unwelcoming and holding rooms were bare and austere', the area was repainted, which has slightly improved its appearance.

The prison has very recently started X-raying all property that comes in through reception, in an effort to reduce the flow of drugs found in the EDC.

The reverse cohorting system in place in the EDC worked effectively during the pandemic in containing any Covid infections, the majority of which entered the prison from prisoners transferring from other prisons or arriving from the outside community.

A recent visit to the EDC revealed that prisoners were being given a 70-slide presentation by Insiders (experienced prisoners) about the prison and its facilities. This is a lot for new prisoners to remember. The Insiders stressed that they were always available to prisoners during their stay in the EDC (typically around seven days) to answer any queries. However, a booklet which was also previously given to prisoners providing relevant information has been temporarily discontinued. We understand that the prison is currently reviewing the entire induction process and hopes to have reintroduced the booklet by the end of this calendar year.

In addition to the formal presentation, prisoners are able to speak to Insiders as well as faith centre, Turning Point and Catch22 staff. A nurse also takes blood samples as each new arrival is tested for eight conditions, including hepatitis A and B and HIV.

Vulnerable prisoners are selectively housed throughout the prison on appropriate wings, a practice that appears to work satisfactorily. Any safety issues that do arise are quickly addressed by the prison.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

Last year, the Board reported a worrying upward trend in levels of self-harm. The total number of self-harm incidents fell slightly from 570 last year to 501 this year.

The new ACCT documentation (V6) was fully implemented during the year. This sometimes bulky document seems to have resulted in a general improvement in the recording of observations and handovers, but the prison's own monitoring continues to reveal shortfalls in areas such as first case reviews not taking place in a timely manner and Caremaps not completed.

In line with the new policy of fewer, more focused ACCTs, the number open fell from a level of around 60 per month in the period prior to June 2021 down to an average of around 40 thereafter.

During the period January to March 2022, the number of self-harm incidents rose to 50 following the arrival of two prolific self-harmers. The number had previously remained stable at 40. Complex case reviews were put in place to help with this. The average number of self-harming individuals has been broadly consistent for several years at around 25 per month.

IMB members have continued to be impressed by the care and concern that the small, committed safer custody team shows to prisoners who are referred to it (sometimes directly by the IMB), and which is evident at the weekly SIM. The monitoring of the triggers to self-harm continues although it is unclear what interventions are planned as a result.

By year end, 10 Listeners had been trained by the Samaritans. Data provided by the Samaritans showed that over the reporting year, Listeners provided face-to-face emotional support to fellow prisoners on 218 occasions. Of these, 84% were between 7am and 7pm, 15% were between 7pm and 1am and 1% were between 1am and 7am. Listeners have reported back that although arrangements for callouts have been agreed with prison staff, these are not always observed. Furthermore, for some years, Listeners have been told by prisoners that staff do not always facilitate callouts requested by prisoners. The HMIP survey found in November that 'less than a third of respondents said it was easy to speak to a Listener'.

One Prisons and Probation Ombudsman report has been published during the reporting year into a death which took place in the previous reporting year. This made a number of recommendations, involving clinical management of prisoners on arrival, ACCT monitoring, emergency response procedures and family liaison procedures. The prison has taken action on these recommendations. The Board remains concerned at the number of outstanding coroner's inquests – currently six, only two of which are from 2021. Of the remaining four, one is outstanding from 2015, one from 2018 and two from 2019. The Board considers this to be inconsiderate to the prisoners' families and disrespectful to each of the deceased.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

During the course of the reporting year, assaults on staff have generally declined whilst prisoner on prisoner (PoP) assaults have increased. This is true for both minor and serious offences.

PoP minor assaults rose from 145 last year to 226 this year, with serious assaults rising from 35 to 47. Conversely staff assaults fell from 210 minor assaults to 151, and serious assaults from 24 to 17.

It is believed that the increase on PoP violence, which rose dramatically in the first two quarters of 2022, can be attributed to the greater time out of cells as lockdown restrictions were eased and which afforded more opportunities for acts of violence. The decline in staff assaults, whilst pleasing, is harder to explain.

All acts of violence are now recorded by reason and location in the prison, graded by the level of violence, and compared with other London prisons. Thameside remains near the top of the list for all types of violence, along with Wandsworth and Pentonville.

The number of prisoners on CSIP has declined during the year and is currently averaging around eight being open at any time. This led to a recent drive to increase the numbers again – particularly as a preventative tool rather than being purely reactive. The Board's ability to monitor the quality of the intervention meetings remains hampered by limited access to the NOMIS system, an issue that has been raised in its previous annual reports.

A small team of forensic psychologists works with prisoners to reduce violence and encourage more pro-social behaviours. It also supports staff in key areas such as the CSU.

As a London reception prison taking from the surrounding community, there is a significant cohort of prisoners from local gangs. At the year end, Thameside held 143 gang nominals (11% of the prison's population) from 77 different gangs. Gang violence within Thameside is relatively low – 10% of all violence in the last six months of the reporting year. Prisoner flows help to keep gang violence relatively low and this is at least in part due to the ability to move some difficult prisoners on to other establishments as part of regular progression moves. The gangs team works very closely with the security and violence reduction teams and holds weekly meetings to discuss key information.

4.4 Use of force

Given the number of new staff, there has been a need to continue refresher training for custodial staff in appropriate UoF and control and restraint procedures. This appears to have been largely successful as planned UoF is at lower levels than in previous years at between 10 and 13 per quarter. Spontaneous UoF has declined since last year when it averaged around 200 per quarter to below 115 per quarter currently.

The monthly UoF meeting monitors the number of planned and unplanned incidents, the reasons why force was deployed, the techniques used and whether BWVCs were activated or not.

The IMB welcomes the continued expectation of senior managers that custodial staff activate their BWVCs at the beginning of any incident and that all reports on such incidents include the BWVC reference.

However, it is only recently that the ability to view this footage has been made available, for example, in the adjudications room, although viewing is still not possible in other areas where it would be of use. Similarly, investigations by the IMB have shown that, whilst a BWVC may have been used, it may only have been activated after the key point in the incident under investigation. Nevertheless, the increased use of BWVCs is welcomed by the IMB as another way of investigating contested events.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The prison has taken steps to reduce the number of illicit items entering the prison during the course of the year, including scanning all possessions entering via reception and piloting a new scheme to help identify bogus Rule 39 letters. However, drug use throughout the reporting year has been hard to evaluate as MDT only resumed towards the end of the reporting year. Nevertheless, the number of hooch and drug finds have remained broadly stable from last year (hooch: 85 finds in 2021 and 86 in 2022; drugs: 158 finds in 2021 and 147 in 2022).

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Facilities. Residential wings are in general clean and decent. A programme of repainting has been undertaken this year. All cells have a shower, toilet, phone and a computer system that prisoners use to access prison services and activities such as meals, canteen, visits, medical appointments and gym. A TV is available for a small charge depending on prisoner status. Most cells are shared by two prisoners; there remain inappropriate instances of cell sharing by sentenced and remand prisoners.

Although HMP Thameside is a relatively new prison, key facilities have become life expired and the responsiveness of facilities management to broken or damaged facilities needed improvement. The prison has taken a grip on these issues this year.

Accommodation repairs (such as broken observation panels and out of use cells) have improved, and the CMS system has been completely replaced and upgraded throughout the prison. While the latter did not go entirely smoothly and caused disruption to the lives of prisoners, the new system has bedded down and provides greater functionality (such as the availability of the virtual campus in cells). The Board is told that investment is committed to replace the lifts. These regularly break down and impact on the safe delivery of hot meals and the ability of the ambulance service to access the upper wings. Fire systems have been enhanced and some wing serving equipment replaced. The Board commented last year that on some wings, the latter was damaged and unhygienic.

Cell bells. Delays in answering the emergency cell bells remain of concern and, as in past years, prisoners regularly reported this to the IMB, especially affecting the night period when staffing is low and a remote arrangement operates to answer prisoner calls. The systems underpinning the emergency cell bell system are acknowledged to have faults, and no reliable data has existed for much of the year on the percentage answered on time. The IMB remains concerned not only at the number of cell bells answered outside of the five-minute period but also at the number of calls that are shown to be cancelled immediately on answering by the operator. This situation needs urgently resolving.

Clothing. Prisoner clothing and bedding continue to cause concerns. Over several months the IMB reported that equipment in the prison laundry was out of action, and HMIP found that less than half of prisoners surveyed said they could access regular clean clothing and sheets. As Covid receded, the prison in October 2021 resumed clothing hand-ins from prisoner families. However, this excluded prisoners already in Thameside, who were those in greatest need of a top-up of personal clothing. This policy was insensitive and led to frustrated complaints to the IMB (see 5.8).

Food. The quality of the food is good and there are few complaints. Appropriate and approved special diets are well catered for by the kitchen manager. As Covid restrictions relaxed, formal health and safety training resumed for wing serving workers (including the importance of avoiding cross-contamination between halal and non-halal food). The IMB notes that of all the departments in the prison, the kitchen manager is the most frequent attendee at PIAC meetings and always endeavours to respond to the requests made by the prisoners through the PIAC reps (see 5.3).

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) has 18 cells with an average daily occupancy this year of 13 (last year 11). Cells are basic and there are two small outside exercise yards. Prisoners have a radio and may qualify for a TV. All prisoners are visited daily by faith centre staff and by a doctor three times a week. A nurse administers medication daily and checks on welfare.

While the CSU is used in response to assaults, fights and possession of unauthorised articles including drugs, some of these prisoners will have complex needs and may suffer with mental ill health and self-harming behaviours. In the first three months of 2022, nine prisoners on an ACCT were housed in the CSU. In the same period 10 prisoners were participating in the CSIP (violence reduction) programme, one of whom was also on an ACCT. Some have been later assessed as needing treatment in the prison's inpatient healthcare unit for mental health reasons.

The unit is staffed by officers with appropriate aptitude and understanding for the challenging and special environment of segregation. They are regularly observed by Board members displaying patience and professionalism in their work. A forensic psychology team provides support and guidance to the unit and helps create support packages for individual prisoners.

Where possible, prisoners leave the CSU within seven to 10 days. A small number remain challenging and violent, presenting staff with difficult judgements about whether it is safe to place them back in a houseblock. Good order or discipline (GOOD) reviews observed by the IMB have been conducted fairly and there were three 42-day reviews this year (same as last year). There were no 84-day reviews (three last year).

The use of special accommodation has not been excessive and has been observed by the IMB to be a last resort. Dirty protests do not automatically lead to special accommodation.

Adjudications. A total of 3,498 adjudication hearings were held, a decrease from 3,723 last year. Of these 59% were proven (last year 56%). Adjudications attended by IMB members have been observed to be conducted fairly, and punishments to be considered and appropriate.

Adjudication processes and paperwork have improved. Around a third of adjudications are adjourned though most proceed to completion. There is a backlog in police responses to more serious incidents which are referred to them for investigation rather than resolved by the prison. These include alleged assaults on prisoners by other prisoners, as well as on staff by prisoners.

Facilities to show evidence from BWVCs have now been installed to assist the adjudication processes, and to supplement CCTV evidence. An initial problem that not all adjudicators could access the system appears to have been overcome. Independent adjudicator hearings restarted during the year by video link.

5.3 Staff-prisoner relationships, key workers

Staffing. For much of the reporting year the prison suffered from severe staff shortages. In February 2022 there were 48 vacancies for prison custodial officers

and 25 vacancies in operational support officers, administrative staff and kitchen chefs. This had adverse effects on prisoners, especially as Covid restrictions relaxed, preventing the staffing of activities such as the gym and increased time out of cell. The need to staff a greater number of external hospital bed watches this year exacerbated the problem.

The prison responded with a substantial upwards pay adjustment for most staff to overcome lack of competitiveness, and with retention bonuses for some staff. The indications are that this has stabilised staffing levels. At reporting year-end the prison was close to full staffing with a reduced attrition rate.

Though the prospects for operating the expected regime for prisoners have improved significantly, there are many new and inexperienced custodial officers (close to 40% with less than one year's experience) who will need time to become fully confident in the role.

Staff-prisoner relations. Most interactions between prisoners and staff observed by the IMB are positive and professional. Prisoners sometimes tell the IMB that staff have been unhelpful or brusque when asked for help about issues that concern them, or ineffective in providing help. It is of concern that prisoner complaints against staff rose by two-thirds during the year (see section 5.7). The Board has sampled responses by management to this category of complaint and found them to be dealt with respectfully and to engage appropriately with the issues raised.

Prisoner forum. A prisoner forum (PIAC) exists where prisoner representatives from each wing meet managers and staff. In mid-year the Board became concerned that the forum had fallen into near abeyance with irregular meetings, poor attendance and repeated lack of follow-up by staff and managers to agreed actions. The Board raised their concerns with the Director and has been pleased to note a significant improvement in the frequency of the meetings and engagement by managers from across the prison with the issues raised at the forum.

A positive initiative has been to expand the remit of the wing prisoner representatives. Now termed complaints, applications and decency (CAD) reps, they deal directly with prisoners on some issues that would otherwise be handled by staff, and check that cells are adequately decent prior to a new arrival.

Key worker scheme. In April 2022, 408 prisoners had yet to be allocated a key worker. HMIP reported that the regularity and quality of key work was variable, and the Board identified that some sessions were logged as completed when they had not taken place. Management have made efforts to improve the quality of key work sessions and entries, but the value-added of the scheme remains hard to quantify. While prisoners have not fed back to the Board any views on the key worker scheme, random sampling of entries by the IMB continues to depict a very varied picture: while a few sessions show meaningful conversations between the prisoner and his key worker, other sessions are clearly just a 'cut and paste' version of the previous session. In some cases, this has been repeated over a number of weeks.

5.4 Equality and diversity

HMP Thameside has a diverse prisoner population which is matched to a greater or lesser extent by staff working within the prison. More diversity and equalities data

across the prison is collected than in past years. But analysis and interpretation of this data to reach meaningful conclusions and improve prisoner outcomes remains limited. Black prisoners consistently appear disproportionately more likely than White prisoners to be on the basic incentives scheme level, to be housed in the CSU and to make complaints, and less likely to be on the enhanced incentives scheme level. The Board would welcome more analysis to understand the drivers for this disproportionality in outcomes, and what revised approaches could be adopted. HMIP in its inspection report this year made similar comments.

The broad area of equality, diversity and inclusion is managed and monitored by a small staff team. Prisoner forums have been re-established during the year for each protected characteristic, led by a member of the senior management team. The diversity and equality action team (DEAT) addresses a large agenda, but HMIP and the Board observed that few substantive actions appear to be generated by it.

The promotion of diversity awareness through events such as Black History Month and LGBTQ+ celebrations continue to be done well. Accessibility to prison activities and services for the mobility impaired is good, though can still be frustrated by lift failures. Transgender prisoners are appropriately supported. Arrangements for prisoners requiring PEEPs are updated daily, and a list maintained of those with hearing or visibility impairment.

There has been a post-lockdown return of Home Office immigration staff to work with the approximately 250 foreign national (FN) prisoners held in Thameside. A valuable hand-held rapid translation tool for use by staff on wings and in reception has also been introduced for non-English speakers.

Discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs). Prisoners submitted 132 DIRFs during the year, compared to 106 last year. Thirty-seven were rejected as not qualifying as DIRFs and the prisoners advised of the alternative route to use. Thirteen were upheld, compared to 11 last year. Data on the 13 DIRFs upheld show:

- Protected characteristic: race six, disability three, sexual orientation two, age/disability one, religion/ belief one
- DIRF type: prisoner on prisoner eight, prisoner on staff four, other one

DIRF responses seen by the Board indicate that they have received careful consideration. The Board has not observed instances of overt equalities discrimination towards prisoners in its monitoring work.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The multi-faith chaplaincy team provide committed and invaluable faith, pastoral and bereavement support throughout the prison. They also support vulnerable prisoners, visit the CSU and contribute to equality and diversity work. Significant effort goes into celebrating the major religious festivals and providing the appropriate diets in conjunction with the catering manager.

While Covid restrictions were in place, the team maintained their presence on the wings, talking and praying with prisoners and providing pastoral support. They distributed printed material for the suspended weekly faith services which were played on the prisoner DVD channel. As Covid restrictions on the size of gatherings

and prisoner movements have relaxed, there has been a much-welcomed phased return to religious services and faith classes in the faith centre. At the end of the reporting year a maximum attendance of 50 worshippers was in operation, with restrictions on mixing between houseblocks. While this did not allow a return to pre-pandemic weekly corporate worship for the numerically largest groups of Muslim, Roman Catholic and Church of England faiths, a houseblock rotation was in operation at the end of June 2022 to cater for these groups. Rules on the size of gatherings have been relaxed further since then.

There are good links to external agencies, such as the Samaritans who provide training and support for prison Listeners, and the Sycamore Tree project who are running restorative justice sessions in the faith centre. This programme explores the effects of crime on victims and the wider community. It encourages the participants of the programme to take responsibility for the offences they have committed and to individually reflect on the effects that their crimes have had on their victims.

Genesis Advantage, a community interest company specialising in immigration issues, has continued to visit FN prisoners to provide valuable and much needed support and advice.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The prison reintroduced the pre-Covid incentives scheme in September 2021. The reintroduction of basic level after 18 months led to some prisoners reacting strongly to the loss of their TV, and an escalation of the original incident. Other prisoners complain they qualify for enhanced status but are unable to be accommodated on an enhanced wing. Typically, around four to five percent of prisoners have been on basic level.

The prison remains on a learning curve with its use of the incentives scheme leading to the hoped-for reduction in adjudications (though some offences are required to be dealt with by adjudication). A recent initiative is an incentive ticket process which challenges poor behaviour (initially non-attendance at education) and recognises positive behaviour (such as assisting staff during an incident). Prisoners are – as appropriate – issued a ticket by officers which is recorded on their NOMIS record.

At a more strategic, whole-prison-level, detailed policies have been developed to link incentives scheme levels directly to an accommodation strategy under which all wings will be categorised according to differing levels of incentives available on that wing, such as time out of cell, cooking facilities and wing furnishings. Three tiers of wings will broadly align with basic, standard and enhanced levels for all prisoners.

This incentives-based approach is designed to reinforce the standards of behaviour that are expected of all prisoners in Thameside, and the benefits available from complying with them. Prisoners will sign behaviour compacts indicating expected behaviour.

The Board in principle supports this direction of travel and over the coming year will be monitoring its further development and implementation to ensure it is understood by prisoners and staff and seen to be fair, consistent and non-discriminatory in application and how it contributes to the overall prison environment.

5.7 Complaints

Prisoners submitted 2,036 formal complaints to prison managers during the reporting year (last year 1,677). Of these, 874 were in the first six months and 1,162 in the second six months. The top three complaints were:

- Property - 457. Last year 285. *Increase* of 60%. This was the top complaint in every month of the year July 2021 to June 2022.
- Complaints about staff - 293. Last year 175. *Increase* of 67%
- Residential - 259. Last year 342. *Decrease* of 25%

In the first half of the year, the timeliness of complaints responses fell unacceptably to below 60% on time (generally within five working days). It recovered strongly in the second half of the year, consistently exceeding 90%. However delays by staff in the subsequent collection and delivery to prisoners of the complaint response letters resulted in many prisoners receiving them later than should have been the case, and causing avoidable frustration.

Several prisoners complained to the IMB during the year that COMP1 forms were unavailable on the wings. This often resulted in them submitting COMP2 confidential forms or directing their issue to the IMB. Many prisoners appear unaware of how the complaints system operates.

The percentage of complaints upheld also increased through the year, averaging 20% in the last quarter of the year against 14% in the first quarter. Though a survey by HMIP found that prisoners had low confidence in the complaints system, the increase in those being upheld potentially suggests more credence is being given by managers to the reasons prisoners complain.

As in previous years the quality of responses seen by the Board has varied, though an increasing number deal well and comprehensively with the issues raised. COMP1 complaints against staff have been generally handled appropriately and better than in the past. Some very poor responses have been seen by the Board from reception staff to prisoners seeking their property (see 5.8 Property).

The prison's handling of COMP2 confidential complaints to the Director has improved further this year.

5.8 Property

Property was the top complaint of prisoners in every month of the year, increasing by 60% (from 285 to 457). Prisoner applications to the IMB about property have risen markedly. This is clearly unacceptable given the importance rightly attached by prisoners to the security of their personal property.

The greatest number of complaints are regarding frustration with delays in the forwarding of property from reception, especially items which prisoners have ordered on their canteen or have been sent across to reception from the post room. The IMB has seen crates in the reception area full of prisoner property still waiting – sometimes after several months – to be delivered to cells. The Board has also seen what can only be described as uncaring and dismissive staff responses to prisoner complaints saying these items will be delivered soon, although they seldom are.

Many other complaints are from transferred prisoners who can wait for weeks or even months for Thameside to send on property that was not taken with them on the escort van. Staff failure to complete cell clearance forms is a further common cause of complaint about lost and missing property.

Unnecessary frustration was caused to many prisoners when property hand-ins were restarted in October 2021 only for newly arrived prisoners; thus excluding those who had been in Thameside longest and who had not had one for 18 months. The Board continues to believe that this is unfair to this cohort of prisoners.

The prison needs to do better with its handling of prisoner property.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

Throughout the Covid pandemic, the prison management alongside the healthcare provider Oxleas have continued to work successfully together in proactively responding to a constantly changing situation. From July 2021 to December 2021, only 10 Covid cases were reported in Thameside. However, due to the Omicron outbreak in early 2022, reported cases rose to 27 in January 2022 but by the end of June 2022 had dropped to five.

As with many local London prisons, the prison population at HMP Thameside presents a range of physical and mental health conditions in greater numbers than that found in the general public. Providing healthcare to this cohort of prisoners is a challenge.

6.1.1 Healthcare survey

For a number of years, the IMB has received more applications from prisoners complaining about healthcare issues than any other subject. These range from issues about medication, waiting times for appointments, delays in receiving test results and response times to complaints submitted to the healthcare provider Oxleas. In order to properly gauge the extent of these complaints, the IMB carried out a survey on prisoners' CMS over a two-week period between March and April 2022, covering three main areas:

- appointments
- medication
- contact with healthcare and complaints

6.1.2 Appointments

According to records supplied by Oxleas, the longest waiting period from the day a healthcare appointment was booked to the actual day of the appointment was 204 days. Sixty-three percent of prisoners were seen within seven days of booking an appointment and 18% had to wait over three weeks for an appointment.

In contrast, according to the survey results only 7% had received an appointment within a week and 79% of respondents said they waited longer than three weeks for an appointment.

It is important to note that the discrepancy in the above waiting times between the two groups reflects the different way the term 'waiting time' is perceived: for prisoners, the wait time begins when they first request an appointment through CMS and continues until the actual appointment takes place. Healthcare waiting times for appointments are calculated from the time that the appointment is made until the actual appointment date. If CMS messages sent by prisoners requesting an appointment are not read or responded to promptly by healthcare administrators (see 6.1.4 below), there will inevitably be a mismatch between the two.

According to data supplied by Oxleas, approximately 65% of all booked appointments during the reporting year went ahead. Of those that didn't go ahead, 11% were due to either healthcare cancelling or other operational reasons and 22% due to DNA.

According to the prisoner survey, of those who got an appointment, only 25% of appointments went ahead. Of the 75% that didn't go ahead, only 1% was due to the prisoner not needing the appointment. Over 50% were due to either healthcare cancelling the appointment or no one coming to collect the prisoner. In the case of no one collecting the prisoner, the IMB understands that this is recorded by healthcare as a DNA.

6.1.3 Dispensing of medication

According to data supplied by Oxleas, approximately 55% of prisoners receive medication under supervision and 45% have medication in possession. Medication continues to be one of the most common issues raised by prisoners to the IMB and was highlighted in the Board's previous year's annual report, both regarding whether medication had been available at the medication hatch to collect and, more worrying, incorrect dispensing of medication to prisoners on a number of occasions.

Given that the IMB had already raised concerns about medication in its previous reporting year (July 2020 – June 2021), it is very concerning that this was an issue raised by HMIP during the inspection in November 2021, specifically:

- incidents where medication was not available, including delays in repeat prescriptions
- incidents where medication was dispensed to the wrong prisoner
- incidents where keys were left in medicine cupboard doors

The availability of medication was also one of the areas addressed in the IMB healthcare survey conducted in March/April this year. Nearly half of the prisoners who responded said their medication had not been available in the last eight weeks. Of these 76% said medication had not been available on up to four occasions and the remaining 24% said it had not been available on up to 10 or more occasions. Only 25% of prisoners had been told why their medication was not available.

6.1.4 Healthcare complaints and communication

Over the reporting year, a number of the applications received by the Board raised concerns about response times to complaints submitted to the healthcare provider Oxleas. Again this was an issue raised in detail in last year's annual report and was also another area of concern in the HMIP report in November 2021 for similar reasons. HMIP found the responses they sampled were poor, in that 'they did not address the issue, were curt in manner, were illegible...' As a result a new complaints procedure was put in place with a number of improvements, including a seven day response time.

However, data given by Oxleas to the IMB in May 2022 on the numbers of complaints marked as 'completed' for the preceding four months shows that on average only two-thirds were actually dealt with:

Month	Total number of complaints received	Total number of complaints completed	Percentage completed
January '22	60	45	75%
February '22	59	45	76%
March '22	63	40	63%
April '22	83	39	47%

It should be noted that the above figures only indicate whether the complaints were dealt with or not – they do not indicate whether they were completed within the seven-day limit.

In our survey, carried out at the end of April, prisoners expressed their dissatisfaction regarding their communication with healthcare. Of the prisoners who said they had either contacted healthcare using CMS or submitted a healthcare complaint, only 16% had received a response. Of these, only one third were satisfied with the response. The reasons for dissatisfaction with the responses received were either that there was no follow up as promised or that they were still waiting for the appointment or treatment that had been promised.

Furthermore, 25% of the prisoners who responded to our survey complained about staff attitudes: saying they found healthcare staff rude, uncaring, discourteous, dismissive, while others complained about the lack of confidentiality.

It should be noted that while the IMB had seen little or no noticeable improvements during the reporting year regarding the complaints system, at the time of writing this annual report (August 2022), the Board has since seen examples of appropriate, caring and prompt responses to complaints from the new head of healthcare. We look forward to further improvements in the coming reporting year.

6.1 5 Local delivery board (LDB)

Governance of healthcare in the prison is provided by the LDB which is made up of representatives from Serco, Oxleas, NHS England and the local authority. The IMB understands that the LDB is scheduled to meet every two months. Over the reporting year it has met on four occasions, July and September of 2021 and January and June of 2022. At the time of writing (August 2022), no further dates had been set.

In the last LDB meeting in June, the IMB raised concerns regarding the data presented to the group and the use made of this data. Much of the data presented was of little use as key information was missing from the tables or graphs. Additionally, some data sets seemed to give contradictory information. Furthermore, there was little or no discussion or analysis of the data presented in any of the previous LDB meetings attended by the IMB. The IMB believes that this group should:

- prioritise the key data to be discussed at each meeting, for example. cancelled and DNA appointments
- discuss complaints handling – topics and response times

In attending to the above issues, improvements would be made for prisoners in terms of physical and mental health outcomes as well as patient satisfaction.

In its last annual report, the Board expressed its concern at the lack of collaborative work between the dual diagnosis nurse employed by Oxleas and the work carried out by Turning Point. The IMB repeats its concern in this report and urges the LDB to consider adopting a more collaborative working relationship between Oxleas and Turning Point for the benefit of prisoners with substance misuse issues.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Over the reporting period, Covid vaccinations were administered as follows:

1 st dose	971 vaccinations
2 nd dose	723 vaccinations (74% of those eligible)
3 rd dose	383 vaccinations (53% of those eligible)

A number of clinics such as GP, advanced nurse Practitioner and substance misuse dual diagnosis have seen an increase in the number of completed appointments since their move to the wings. For the reporting year, according to data supplied by Oxleas, 82% were completed, 10% were cancelled by the unit or due to no access¹ and 8% were missed due to patients not turning up ('did not attend', or DNA).

Completion figures supplied by Oxleas for other clinics show that between one third and two thirds of appointments went ahead. Nearly 20% of chiropodist appointments and more than 20% of optician appointments were cancelled by the unit or due to no access. The DNA data for all clinics was at least 20%, with some much higher than that e.g. orthopaedic (36%) and x-ray (57%).

The IMB believes that more investigation should be carried out into the reasons for appointments not taking place – either cancelled by the unit/no access or patient DNA, particularly for those clinics where the numbers are higher than average. The IMB also has concerns about Oxleas' definition of DNA in the prison context, a concern shared by the prison management. These issues should be priority agenda items at local delivery board (LDB) meetings (see Local delivery board 6.1.5).

See also section 6.1.2 Appointments.

6.3 Mental health

There are a number of Oxleas mental health teams, providing a range of services, such as: in-reach team (referrals and assessments), Atrium (counselling and psychotherapy), psychological therapy service (psychosocial therapies and cognitive behavioural therapy), substance misuse and dual diagnosis, learning disability and psychiatry.

However, a common concern from both prison staff who make a referral and prisoners themselves who have requested mental health support is that there is no feedback about referral decision making.

¹ According to Oxleas, 'no access' means that the prisoner was scheduled elsewhere e.g. either at court, at visits or at education

Additionally, anecdotal feedback from prison staff suggests some concern about the out of hours referral process for prisoners who are in need of immediate crisis support.

According to the data supplied by Oxleas during the reporting year, out of 1,434 face-to-face psychiatry appointments booked, only 60% of the appointments went ahead. Twenty-four percent of appointments did not go ahead due to DNAs and 17% were due to the unit cancelling.

Throughout the year, 62 patients were transferred from Thameside to a secure psychiatric hospital but only 32 were transferred within the NHS guideline of 14 days from initial assessment. Thus slightly less than half of these severely ill patients at Thameside had to wait longer than the recommended wait period. Although the average wait for transfer was 39 days (still three times longer than the recommended time), in one case the patient was held in Thameside for a total of 188 days (approximately six months) before being transferred. The IMB understands that for some patients, a delay can be due to the need for enhanced multiple assessments in order to identify the appropriate type of bed security. However, delays can also be due to commissioning disputes and/or long waiting lists. The IMB considers it wholly inhumane to keep a mentally ill patient in a prison environment for longer than the guidelines state. As well as being inhumane for the prisoner, it is also distressing for the staff who care for the prisoner. Furthermore, on a practical level, it causes bed blocking for other prisoners in need of an inpatient bed, who because of their unstable behaviour are unsuitable to remain on the wings. In some cases, for the safety of all, these prisoners are housed in the prison's CSU instead.

6.4 Social care

The prison works closely and effectively with the social services team of the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG), the commissioning agents, and with Change, Grow, Live (CGL), the agency that delivers social care in the prison. All parties attend the weekly SIM meeting and also meet fortnightly to discuss individuals of concern in detail. Change, Grow, Live deliver the care required by individual prisoners either by using their own resources or, where appropriate, by using specially trained prisoners. At the end of the reporting year, there were seven trained care and support orderlies providing personal care to 22 prisoners on approved social care plans. Where necessary, CGL will also provide more specialist care.

The IMB has not received any applications or complaints from prisoners regarding their social care. Representatives from both RBG and CGL told the IMB that although they work across the Woolwich prisons cluster, they have the closest involvement with HMP Thameside due to the close links with the diversity and equality team at Thameside.

There is a relatively stable number of prisoners with physical mobility issues subject to personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) monitoring – 13 at year end compared to 16 at the start of the year. They are mainly housed on ground floors.

We have noted one issue around the provision of a wheelchair with disagreements between the prison and healthcare about who was responsible for providing an appropriate chair.

6.5 Exercise, regime

Regime. While a restrictive regime was in operation at the beginning of the reporting year, by October 2021, the prison had moved to an incremental regime relaxation under Stage 2. Education classes had started with limited numbers and both the library and gym prepared to open their doors once again (see section 7). A more organised and purposeful approach to time out of cell than association was introduced where all prisoners would engage in structured on wing activity (SOWA) with half of each wing unlocked at a time to enable this to take place. SOWA would include prisoner engagement in activities such as pool, table tennis and board games.

Unfortunately, by December 2021, due to the nationwide increase in Covid infections, the prison had reverted to Stage 4. By January 2022, the prison had moved again to Stage 3 and by February 2022, to Stage 2. By May 2022, HMPPS had released all prisons from the requirement to operate within national EDM levels and since then, the prison has gradually worked towards a more normal pre-Covid regime although this has been hampered by staff shortages at custodial, operational support and administrative levels.

For the last two months of the reporting year, SOWA has been in operation, although the IMB has found this to be inconsistently applied across the wings. While on some wings visited, prisoners were engaged in board games, pool and other activities, on other wings, no structured activities were in evidence when the IMB visited.

The Board understands that the prison expects that prisoners' time out of cell overall will reduce from the 7.5 hours a day that was the norm before Covid to 6.5 hours in the future. It points to the greater opportunities for prisoners to be productively engaged in their cells by using the new CMS virtual campus and e-learning tools. However, the Board remains concerned by the number of hours prisoners remain locked behind their cell doors and will continue to monitor this area closely in the coming year to gain a fuller picture of the developing regime.

Gym. In the last two months of the reporting year, the gym – always a popular area for the prisoners at Thameside – has offered a variety of sessions during the weekdays and weekends. Unfortunately, as in previous years, staff shortages mean that the gym is one of the first areas to be closed when cross deployment is needed. A snapshot of gym availability for 11 days in June 2022 show that:

- The gym had only been fully open on two whole days during this period.
- On five of the remaining nine days, between one third and one half of gym activities were cancelled each day due to cross deployment of staff.
- Four of the affected days occurred over weekends when there are fewer other activities available in the prison such as work, education or library. On one of those weekend days, the gym was closed for the whole day.

The IMB understands the need for maintaining secure staffing levels in key areas of the prison but still remains concerned that the gym seems to be the first 'go to' area when cross deployment is needed.

The IMB also notes that there are no specific sessions timetabled for prisoners who work full-time, such as those who work in the kitchens. The IMB was told that if this cohort of prisoners wishes to access the gym, they must request time off from their

employers. The IMB believes this places prisoners in an awkward and unfair dilemma and asks prison managers to reconsider this policy.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The social enterprise group Turning Point continues to provide excellent support and treatment programmes for an average of 304 prisoners per month with drug and alcohol problems. This represents approximately 26% of the prison population at HMP Thameside. Due to lockdown restrictions, room availability and suitability, integrated drug treatment system groups were unable to restart until January 2022. The average monthly new reception caseload for Turning Point is 81. Approximately 40 Turning Point clients are released each month, 29 of whom receive naloxone kits. A major challenge for the service is the high number of prisoners released homeless – on average 54 remand prisoners and 80 sentenced prisoners each month – into the community.

One of the strengths of the team is its ability to work creatively with multidisciplinary teams and this has been evident post-pandemic when the team has been proactive in resuming both its face-to-face work in the prison and its through the gate (TTG) services with community partners. Recent improvements in services include:

- On entry to the prison, prisoners with a substance misuse problem are automatically referred to Turning Point on an 'opt out' basis, rather than being given the choice to 'opt in' as before.
- The SCAR programme – Supporting Change and Recovery – continues to be popular with an average 16 prisoners each month. At year end (June 2022), a new group called ARCH (Alcohol Really Can Harm) was set up – this two-week programme has already proved popular with prisoners.
- Attendance figures of recent ex-prisoners on the day of their release to community-based appointments in Tower Hamlets have risen from 20% pre-pandemic to 80% post-pandemic.

The Board receives no applications or complaints from prisoners regarding the support and treatment offered by Turning Point staff and commends the team for the valuable work they do both in the prison and with partner agencies in supporting prisoners on release.

7. Progression and resettlement

In September 2020, HMP Thameside became a reception and resettlement prison under the reconfiguration strategy of HMPPS. The prison now holds two thirds remand prisoners and one third category C resettlement prisoners near the end of their sentence. This change coupled with the effects of the pandemic has meant that the planning necessary to meet the needs of this changing population has been challenging.

The Board has become increasingly aware that provision of resettlement services for prisoners in HMP Thameside has been limited. In order to properly gauge the extent of the issue, in June, sentenced prisoners who were scheduled for release in the next three months were asked to complete a survey.

The survey covered five main areas:

- education
- work
- training
- finance, benefits and debt support
- accommodation

Where appropriate, reference is made to the results of the survey in the following sections.

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 Education

Due to the pandemic, education was restricted to in-cell packs until October 2021. The resumption of face-to-face classes was a cautious phased return, starting with very small class sizes and only reaching full capacity (12 per class) in May. Once in-person lessons restarted (however restricted) no blended learning model was offered, and all in-cell education ceased. This resulted in a real reduction in education provision, however limited, for prisoners.

Data for the current academic year (1 April /2022 – 9 June 2022) shows that 49% of learners who completed a course achieved an outcome.¹

Novus has struggled to recruit tutors, which has had a detrimental effect on prisoners. Challenging recruitment conditions were further hampered by delays in vetting leading to successful candidates taking other jobs.

The shortage of tutors was the main reason for poor attendance. A snapshot of three days (30 May 2022 – 1 June 2022) showed that only 37% of planned places were attended. A significant minority of 24 classes did not go ahead at all and so recorded 0% attendance. Of these, 18 classes were cancelled due to Novus failing

¹ This means that the learner, depending on the course, either gained a full qualification or completed a specific unit.

to provide tutors, three were cancelled due to accommodation issues or the prison failing to deliver learners to the classroom and the reasons for the remaining three were unclear. Only two sessions out of 105 achieved full attendance. Steps are now being taken to better monitor non-attendance and share the information locally. The Board hopes that this will lead to improvements in the coming year.

Seventy-one percent of respondents in our survey had not attended any educational courses during their time in Thameside. Of those who had, English, maths and distance learning were the most attended. Eighty-seven percent of respondents who had attended education stated that the course was either very or quite helpful. Eleven percent stated that the education provision they received was good. Twenty-one percent of those who responded wanted to pursue education whilst 25% felt they had received no help or the help they had got was poor.

As of June 2022 there were 27 students enrolled on distance learning level three courses and one completing an Open University course. In addition, the careers provider Forward Trust which is responsible for organising distance learning in the prison receives course materials every month for approximately seven prisoners who have been transferred to other prisons. These materials are then sent on to the appropriate establishments. Forward Trust staff also see all prisoners who have scored level two on their induction assessments to encourage them to think about distance learning opportunities while they are in prison, rather than wait for prisoners to express an interest. The IMB commends this proactive approach to resettlement.

7.1.2 Library

Covid restrictions continued to limit prisoners' access to the library and it was not until late May that 75-minute general library sessions resumed for up to 12 prisoners at a time. The committed librarian and his staff have worked hard and creatively throughout the reporting year to provide alternative services to the prisoners during the time that the library has been closed.

The library team has offered a 'request and deliver' service which allows prisoners to request titles via CMS. Library staff will endeavour to loan these titles – or equivalents – to them via wing staff.

In conjunction with the charity Prison Reading Groups (PRG) and National Literacy Trust's Books Unlocked scheme, the library offers a monthly remote book club in the absence of real-life sessions.

A number of remote learning courses, hosted by external tutors, have been offered via the in-house DVD channel covering a range of subjects, including: screenwriting; sports writing; how to get published; write your novel; and opera.

One of the DVD channels is a dedicated audiobook channel using audiobook CDs to cope with the demand of very popular titles. Some of the other DVD channels now feature looped programmes and films of popular books, including fitness training sessions which can be performed in cell.

To increase the offering to FN prisoners, library staff have contacted all of the main embassies to request books and magazines. The response has been very positive and has provided further materials for FN prisoners.

The library recently won this year's PRG award for 'Outstanding Feedback at HMP Thameside'. A Twitter message from an ex-prisoner and library orderly at HMP Thameside sums up the feelings of many regular library users at Thameside: *'Thank you very much for letting us be ourselves in the library and I can say that all the books I have are more than just that, the books are reminders of the change I have had to do.'*

The library is a huge asset to Thameside prisoners, and run with commitment and passion. The IMB noted with concern that in January 2022, the funding for the library was withdrawn by HMPPS. Although the contractor Serco has continued to maintain the service, the IMB hopes that responsibility for ongoing funding can be resolved between the two parties in the near future.

7.2 Vocational training, work

The prison is slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels of job opportunities. During lockdown jobs were available at the minimum necessary level to keep the prison running. In mid-May 2022 there were 756 job opportunities across the prison but only 47% filled. Of these, 64% were jobs held by convicted prisoners and 36% by those on remand. Most of these jobs support the running of the prison – laundry, cleaners, kitchen, Bag and Tag, servery workers and wing painters. There are also a number of more trusted positions as orderlies in the CSU, the gym, healthcare, education and the Faith Centre.

Certain accredited qualifications are linked to certain jobs within the prison including industrial cleaning for bio cleaners; food safety, catering and hospitality and health and safety at work for kitchen and servery workers; and introduction to health and social care for care orderlies.

Novus, the education provider, recognised the need to tailor its curriculum to reflect the make-up of the prison – long and short term stays with sentenced and unsentenced prisoners. It now offers some one-day courses including food safety; a three-day health and safety in construction: Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) course; and slightly longer courses in industrial cleaning and ICT. There are also longer courses of up to three months including barbering and catering.

Sentenced prisoners have priority in work allocation. Off-wing jobs are allocated by the labour board and on-wing by the wing managers. Over the reporting year, the IMB has received a number of complaints regarding the allocation of on-wing work and the perceived unfair treatment and lack of transparency.

Seventy-nine percent of respondents in our survey stated they had not attended any training courses whilst in Thameside. Of those who had, barbering, health and safety and peer mentoring were the most attended. Ninety-one percent of respondents who

had attended training courses stated that the course was either very or quite helpful. Twenty-one percent of those who responded wanted to pursue training courses whilst 34% felt they had received no help or the help they had got was poor.

7.3 Offender management, progression

Thameside continues to have a small number of category D prisoners despite it being a category B/C prison. In May 2022 there were seven. Catch22 has worked hard to have such prisoners transferred but has encountered issues with the allocation of places in suitable prisons and shortages in transport.

There is still a small number of life sentenced and indeterminate sentenced prisoners, for whom the prison has never had appropriate facilities. The majority of these are licence recalls; once a newly sentenced lifer's assessments are completed, they transfer to a training prison (usually around 12 weeks post sentence if not sooner). In May 2022 there were three newly sentenced lifers in the prison.

In the past year, Catch22 has not fallen below its target of a minimum of 90% of eligible prisoners having a current OASys assessment. Roughly two-thirds of the prison population is on remand and Catch22 can only offer limited advice to this cohort of prisoners since the reunification of the probation service. The Board commends the work of the Catch22 team in overcoming the various obstacles they have encountered.

During the reporting year, 71 prisoners were released beyond their home detention curfew (in) eligibility date. The Board understands that these delays were caused by slow responses from external community offender managers as well as staffing issues in the Metropolitan Police.

Gang affiliations

In the first 48 hours of arrival, all 18–30-year-olds are spoken to by the gangs team, who liaise with departments in the prison regarding gang conflicts.

The gangs team continues to offer the ROAD (Rehabilitation Offering Another Direction) intervention programme as well as the London Gangs Exit Service, working with prisoners in the last 12 weeks of their sentence to prepare them for a life away from the gangs, once released.

7.4 Family contact

Face-to-face social visits were available throughout the reporting year, however, there were various restrictions in place until mid-May 2022. As a result, take-up of visits was slow. A monitoring check of a social visit session on an afternoon in mid-May 2022 showed that only 23 visits were booked out of 45 available with only 15 attended.

The prison has continued to provide a number of other ways to encourage prisoner interaction with their families. Prisoners could maintain contact using their in-cell

phones. Social video calls, provided by Purple Visits, were also available with prisoners being able to meet their families virtually using a tablet device, although this facility has not been available for the last two months of the reporting year due to technical reasons. The 'email a prisoner' scheme also operated.

Working with the charity Pact – Prison Advice and Care Trust – the prison was able to deliver in-cell parenting courses. Other initiatives included Storybook Dads where fathers or grandfathers can record a story for their children or grandchildren. This is then edited and a DVD with a copy of the book is sent to the children.

It is disappointing that a number of family activities, such as family days, which were suspended throughout the pandemic, have not yet resumed. However, the Families First team, which was temporarily redeployed to undertake Covid testing, is now back in place. The Family and Friends at the Centre of Throughcare (FACT) service role was vacant for much of the reporting year and remains so.

Further work is planned for the visits hall with a reading area for children hoping to be available to prisoners and their families soon.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Despite numerous attempts, the Board has had much difficulty in gaining data for this annual report from some of the agencies involved in resettlement services.

The high turnover and short stay of prisoners at Thameside makes resettlement planning challenging. Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents had been in Thameside for less than three months, 25% for three to six months and only 18% for more than six months.

In June 2021, following the reunification of the probation service, control of resettlement services for sentenced prisoners passed to the probation service. The work was taken over by the probation resettlement team, who have been chronically understaffed throughout the reporting year. Vacancies have proven very difficult to fill – as of May 2022, in HMP Thameside, just over a third of positions were filled.

Due to staffing difficulties, the IMB understands basic custody screening tool 2 (BCST2) assessments were paused and only recently resumed for prisoners on probation recalled to custody. BCST3 meetings (the assessment undertaken in the 12 weeks prior to release) were prioritised.

Accommodation support for sentenced prisoners is provided by St Mungo's. Releasing prisoners to appropriate accommodation is a vital element of rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. The Board was concerned at the percentage of prisoners leaving without adequate housing provision. The average recorded monthly proportion of sentenced prisoners housed on the first night of custodial release varied from 33% to 66%, averaging at 44%. There was no data to show the accommodation outcomes after that first night.

Only 13% of respondents in our survey said they had spoken to resettlement staff about accommodation on release. Sixty percent of respondents had no

accommodation arranged on release. Of those, 80% said they wanted accommodation to be arranged on release.

The Board understands that a new strategic housing specialist is to be allocated to the prison to improve the accommodation support available to prisoners. This is a welcome development.

The Board was concerned that a very low proportion of prisoners discharged from prison had an agreed employment, training or education (ETE) place. According to HMPPS figures, from July 2021 to May 2022, the average recorded monthly proportion of sentenced prisoners in employment at six weeks after custodial release was 6.5%. The highest total reached in any month was 10% and the lowest a mere 3%.

The survey responses in relation to finance, benefit and debt support showed that only 9% of respondents said they had discussed finance, benefits and debt support with resettlement staff. Of the small number who had, 95% found it either very or quite helpful.

Sixty-six percent of respondents had no work arranged on release. Of those who had no work arranged, only 26% stated that they had some contacts, interviews or other leads. Forty-five percent of those who responded stated that they had received no assistance or that the support they had received was poor.

It is hoped that when the Board next reports, the new prison employment lead (PEL) will have improved the employment opportunities for sentenced prisoners leaving Thameside. The PEL will head the proposed employment hub which will work with, amongst others, Maximus, the current ETE service provider. It is proposed that the employment hub will also offer prisoners the chance to connect with a debt management advice charity.

As highlighted in the HMIP inspection report, there has been a large increase in the population of the prison which is on remand or unsentenced. Following the reunification of probation services, unsentenced prisoners do not receive resettlement support. The prison has been very aware of this lack of provision and has funded a new position: a remand housing worker, who – the Board has been told – is due to start soon. It is unfortunate that this gap in provision has existed for so long and unsentenced prisoners' ETE and debt support has remained unserved.

The work of the IMB

At the beginning of the reporting year, Board member numbers totalled 10, four of whom were recently appointed. However, six months later, this had dropped to six with one member on a sabbatical. Numbers remained at this level for the remaining six months of the year. During this period, the Board was also without a clerk.

The Chair is immensely grateful to Board members for their continued hard work in maintaining a weekly presence in the prison. With only a third of our complement of members as well as no clerk, we have had to prioritise our work, and inevitably have not been able to monitor some areas of the prison as closely as we would have liked. Nevertheless, we have endeavoured to cover all essential areas such as responding to applications, conducting weekly rotas, attending adjudications and GOOD reviews and responding to serious incidents. A member of the Board has phoned in most days to the Director's morning meeting with his senior management staff and we have continued to attend selected key meetings.

All Board meetings have taken place in the prison, with some members joining by teleconference, and were attended by the Director or one of his deputies to update members on developments. The Chair and Vice Chair have continued to meet with the Director every month and have also met with the Controller on a monthly basis.

The Board has an open and constructive relationship with the Director, his senior managers and staff, and has been welcomed in all parts of the prison. Members are grateful for the cooperation and support afforded to us by staff at all levels in carrying out our monitoring duties but particularly the assistant directors and custodial operations managers (COMS) who are invariably called upon to assist us in our monitoring work and investigations. A Board member has continued to accept the prison's invitation to brief new custodial officers on the role of the IMB.

At year end, a recruitment drive was conducted alongside the IMBs of HMPs Belmarsh and Isis from which two new members were appointed to the Thameside Board.

The Board was very pleased to welcome a new clerk towards the end of the reporting year.

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	16
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Of whom members on sabbatical or probation	5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment	283
Total number of segregation reviews attended	N/A

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year 20/21	Current reporting year 21/22
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	29	32
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives schemes, sanctions	16	12
C	Equality	4	5
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	19	23
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	25	44
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	11
F	Food and kitchens	4	3
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	95	77
H1	Property within this establishment	17	35
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	22	35
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	3	14
I	Sentence management, including HDC, release on temporary licence, parole, release dates, recategorisation	29	24
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	85	94
K	Transfers	2	5
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	15	26
	Total number of applications	375	440

Glossary of prison terms

ACCT	assessment, care in custody and teamwork (case management for prisoners at risk of suicide or self-harm). (Also, assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) case management documents or reviews)
association	time when prisoners can mix with each other outside their cells
BCST	basic custody screening tool – which determines a prisoner's immediate offending-related needs
BWVC	body-worn video camera worn by custodial officers
canteen	process where prisoners can order goods
category B	prisoners for whom the highest conditions of security are not necessary but for whom escape must be made very difficult
category C	prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions who do not have the will or resources to make a determined escape attempt
category D	prisoners who can be reasonably trusted to serve their sentence in open conditions
cell bell/call bell	a button in cells enabling prisoners to summon staff in an emergency
CSIP	challenge, support and intervention plan – a de-escalation and restraint technique
CSU	care and separation unit – also known as the segregation unit
DNA	did not attend – non-attendance at healthcare appointments
DIRF	discrimination incident reporting form – which prisoners use to submit complaints about discrimination
dual diagnosis	mental health and substance misuse diagnosis
ETE	education, training and employment
GOOD	good order and/or discipline – rule under which a prisoner can be segregated
HDC	home detention curfew – early release 'tagging' scheme
HMIP	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

HMPPS	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
IDTS	integrated drug treatment system – which aims to improve substance use treatment for prisoners
Incentives scheme	a scheme designed to promote good behaviour and challenge misbehaviour
IMB	Independent Monitoring Board
induction	a programme all prisoners should undergo when they enter prison
Insiders	prisoners who introduce new arrivals to prison life
key worker	prison officer given responsibility for supporting a small number of prisoners under the OMiC scheme
Listeners	prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide confidential emotional support to fellow prisoners
MDT	mandatory drug testing
NOMIS	database used in prisons for the management of prisoners
OASys	offender assessment system – which assesses a prisoner's likelihood of reoffending and their risk of harm to others
OMiC	offender management in custody, which involves providing prisoners with key workers
PEEP	personal emergency evacuation plan (for prisoners with mobility problems)
PIAC	Prisoners Information and Activity Committee
PPO	Prisons and Probation Ombudsman – a body that carries out independent investigations into deaths and complaints in custody
restorative justice	a programme where prisoners consider the impact of their offending on victims and offer an apology or reparation
Storybook Dads	where prisoners record a story for their children to listen to at home
SOWA	structured on wing activity
Sycamore Tree	a victim awareness course
'through the gate' services	services to help prisoners resettle in the community on their release
time out of cell	any time prisoners spend out of their cells to associate or use communal facilities
trigger	an event that might cause a prisoner to self-harm
virtual campus	internet access to community education, training and employment opportunities



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