



Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP Thameside  
Griffin Manor Way  
Thamesmead  
London  
SE28 0FJ

21 December 2023

Dear Chair,

**HMP THAMESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023**

Thank you for providing your annual report on HMP Thameside. I commend the Board for carrying out its statutory role effectively, particularly as you operated with several vacancies. I am sorry to hear of the problems experienced recruiting new members due to security vetting, my officials have forwarded your concerns to the IMB Secretariat who will respond to you directly on this matter. I was saddened to hear that two prisoners died during the reporting year, and I would like assure the Board that recommendations made by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman are taken very seriously.

I understand the Board's concerns about the timeliness of transfers for mentally ill prisoners to secure hospital. Where transfer to hospital under the Mental Health Act is the most appropriate way of securing appropriate care and treatment, to ensure that there is oversight of the transfer timescales, prisons in London complete a monthly data collection process for all the s47 and s48 transfers. This enables data collection on all Hospital Order and Remission activity and ensures that the London Region has insight on delivery and performance. Work is progressing at a national level to move towards data collection directly from the patient electronic healthcare record, SystmOne, which will allow a national approach to support delivery from April 2024 onwards. Pilot sites, including HMP Thameside, have been identified for this national programme which commenced in October 2023 to test the new approach.

I acknowledge that the transfer of patients requiring mental health placements remains challenging due to local and national bed pressures. There can also be additional complexities due to patient needs which require referral into secure placements where waiting lists can be higher and wait times for assessment can be longer. Transfers and remissions from prisons in London are overseen by the London Region Transfer and Remissions Service and recruitment is taking place for further support roles to strengthen this oversight and provide support to address issues relating to transfers.

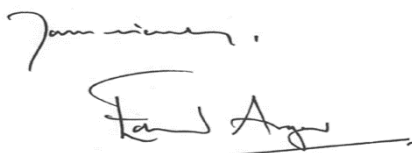
Turning to the Board's concern about Probation staffing and the resettlement support provided to prisoners, in the past 12 months there has been successful probation recruitment in the London region, including within prisons such as the Probation Service Officers (PSO) who deliver the resettlement work. While I appreciate there is still further to go, the resettlement team at HMP Thameside specifically is at 70% of its target staffing model which is an increase from a year ago. Recruitment is continuing with a national TV campaign specifically targeting the PSO grade and it is anticipated the next tranche of staff will be offered roles early in the new year.

Regarding adequate resettlement support, HMP Thameside has a probation pre-release team based in the prison who identify and address immediate resettlement needs and liaise with the Community Probation Practitioner to support pre-release planning activity throughout the sentence. This includes progressing referrals that have been made to the Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) suppliers, such as Catch22. I understand that support for accommodation and personal wellbeing are currently only available to sentenced people in prison. HMPPS is continuing its work on extending the CRS providers to unconvicted and unsentenced people in prison who have accommodation needs. In addition, to the probation resettlement team and Catch22, all prisoners at HMP Thameside have access to the Employment Hub and new resettlement initiatives have recently been introduced, such as Key4Life and construction activities via the Purposeful Activity and Education teams. HMP Thameside has also appointed an additional resettlement manager and is recruiting for a head of employment skills and work. London Probation also partnered with London Prisons Group and the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) in support of a Local Leadership Integration Fund bid by Catch 22 to deliver a resettlement service for prisoners being released from HMP Thameside. The project operated between January 2022 and March 2023 providing a targeted additional resettlement service to prisoners at risk of recall and returning to one of eight East London boroughs. It formed part of the Ministry of Justice Prison Leaver's Project which is currently being evaluated.

Despite your concerns and the staffing difficulties it was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison is managed effectively and prisoners are treated fairly and humanely with complaints processed in timely manner. It was encouraging to read about the work of the Diversity and Equality team to make improvements to discrimination incident processes and the work of the Senior Management to recognise and reward staff for their extraordinary efforts. I was pleased to note the good work of the Employment Hub, which provides prisoners with the opportunities to obtain work on release as well as the work of Catch 22 to support prisoners with resettlement needs during their sentence.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Director will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

I appreciate the valuable contribution from members of Independent Monitoring Boards and am grateful for your work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

**RT HON EDWARD ARGAR MP**

## **HMP THAMESIDE: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023**

### **HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

#### **Prisoners' Property**

HMPPS recognises the Board's concerns about the transfer of prisoners' property, despite implementation of the new *Prisoners' Property* Policy Framework. The Framework places an emphasis on ensuring compliance with volumetric control limits, since anything within these limits will be transferred with the prisoner. Volumetric control limits apply to all prisons and the Framework contains a leaflet to explain these limits to prisoners. The Framework introduced a new requirement that prisons must transfer excess property within four weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances which make this impossible. The Framework is clear that Governors should ensure management checks are undertaken to be assured that prisoners' property is being handled correctly and with care. HMPPS will monitor the impact of the new Framework going forward and will continue to look at what further improvements can be made. Locally HMP Thameside have reviewed cell clearance procedures to strengthen the process including identifying best practice from other prisons and introducing suitable audit baselines to measure compliance. A Reception complaints review has also been completed and an action plan has been implemented to address identified areas of concern as well as controls to begin to reduce property related issues.

#### **Education Contract**

The lack of improvement in the education provision is acknowledged and work is taking place between HMPPS Custodial Contracts Directorate and Education Contract Management to improve outcomes. Specialist education assurance visits are taking place at HMP Thameside and action planning has started to address delivery with further evidence being sought to enable the education service. Monitoring will continue through the formal contractual meetings to ensure action is being taken to improve delivery, particularly against the prisons Ofsted action plan, in order to provide the best opportunity of achieving 'good' or better at the next inspection. Additional further funding has also been allocated to the contract to allow HMP Thameside to appoint a Head of Education, Skills and Work to improve oversight.

#### **Healthcare**

The healthcare contract for HMP Thameside ran for its maximum timeframe and as a result the service had to be re-procured with the successful bidder being awarded the contract in January 2023. It is recognised that any new contract has challenges and this can bring uncertainty for staff during any Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment rights process. The implementation of the new contract was delayed by two months as a result of pharmacy licence requirements and this decision was taken in order to ensure patient safety and compliance. NHS England and the health providers have worked together throughout the mobilisation phase of the contract and the Local Delivery Board meeting remains a forum where areas of concern are escalated, discussed and addressed. NHS England have also worked with the new provider on their assurance and improvement plan as many clinical practices were identified as a concern and measures were put in place to improve patient safety. Staffing has also been an issue due to the need to undertake recruitment and security vetting, however the healthcare provider has a focus on the recruitment pipeline and many new staff have now been recruited. HMPPS have also worked with HMP Thameside to ensure that the staff induction and key training programmes avoid unnecessary delays to accessing IT and keys to allow unescorted presence onsite. A review of the gate process has ensured a more efficient entry of staff and professional visitors in order to address any

impact on shift start times and arrival on duty at the place of work. In addition, work is being undertaken to fully understand the extent and impact that late receptions into custody can have on the healthcare procedures,

### **Information Access**

At HMP Thameside there is remote access for IMB members via multi-factor identification. This allows IMB members direct contact with staff if they need to follow up a concern or check information, as well as gain access to agreed prison information whilst working remotely. Access to Prison-NOMIS, prisoner information system, is obtained via the same process as prisons operated by HMPPS and is overseen by the local Controller's Team. Meetings have previously taken place with the IMB Chair and the Controller to ensure that any barriers that may have been delaying access have been addressed. The Controller's team have offered ongoing support to any IMB members who are struggling to access their accounts.

### **Cell Bells**

The Board's recognition of the focus on improving the cell bell system is welcome. The use of cell bells is now collated nightly for inclusion in the daily operational report and, to ensure management accountability where cell bells have not been answered for over five minutes, records to justify the reasons are maintained. In addition, a new standard operating procedure has been written which provides guidance to staff on how to answer cell bells and how to manage misuse.

### **Key Work**

It is recognised that HMP Thameside has struggled to deliver keywork to the required volume and quality standard since its inception which has been the case in other prisons. The high churn of prisoners and the associated changing case load has created challenges for staff to build the relationship element of keywork, particularly for new or inexperienced staff. To address this, HMP Thameside plans to create a keywork Hub of dedicated Prison Custody Officer (PCO) Keyworkers who are more experienced members of staff and confident in building relationships with prisoners. In addition, having a small group of trained staff will facilitate a more consistent standard of delivery, enable best practice and create better links with other departments across the prison. PCOs will be regularly rotated through the hub over a period time to improve the skills and knowledge of all PCOs.

### **Wing Custody Management System (CMS)**

There is a project in place to test all terminals to see if the lines are faulty or the cables are damaged as well as additional CMS boxes being purchased to fulfil the needs of the population at HMP Thameside. The first visit has already taken place with a number of cells having had their CMS ports fixed. The prison has also introduced an internal CMS repair shop which can now replace broken terminals and prisoner wing representatives have been identified to fix minor repairs in cells.

### **Diversity and Inclusion Analysis**

The local Segregation Management and Review Group meeting already monitors the ethnicity data of prisoners subject to adjudication and segregation and where this data identifies disproportionality, further enquiries are made to understand the difference and ensure there are no discrimination concerns. A monthly Use of Force meeting also monitors the ethnicity of prisoner's who have force used on them during each month to identify disproportionality. In addition to these, the prison utilises the Equality Monitoring Tool from the Performance Hub which records the protected characteristics across varying areas such as population, Adjudication, Complaints, Use of Force and Incentives to support the local analysis that is undertaken.

### **IT Access**

HMPPS Custodial Contracts Directorate are committed to resolving IT access with the prison provider. The Privately Managed Prisons (PMP) group have made contact with the National Chair of the

Independent Monitoring Boards and Chairman of the Lay Observers National Council to establish the exact IT position and the PMP Digital Lead will be in contact with each IMB Chair. Where access issues are identified actions will be developed for each site and updated at monthly IMB meetings to resolution. All non-directly employed staff at HMP Thameside are required to undertake a process to gain access to IT and it is acknowledged that there have been several delays and conflicting advice as to how to set up IT accounts not just for IMB members but other agencies as well. A meeting has taken place with the Local Field Service IT Engineer and the Chair of the IMB to try to alleviate the issues the IMB were experiencing. Serco IT are also in process of producing a new starters guide to ensure any new joiners are aware of the correct process to follow to avoid any unnecessary delays.