



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

**For reporting year
1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026**

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Introductory sections 1 – 3

1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that states designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

2.1 HMP/YOI Thorn Cross is a men's open prison and young offender institution (YOI) situated on the outskirts of south Warrington, in Appleton Thorn, Cheshire. The operational capacity is 429¹(the maximum number of prisoners that can be held without serious risk to safety, security, good order and the proper running of the prison). The prisoners are housed in eight units for category D prisoners nearing the end of their sentence. This also includes those serving life and indeterminate imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentences (with no set release date) who are nearing parole. The objective of the prison is successful rehabilitation into the community and, therefore, reducing reoffending. The establishment has several workshops on site, with opportunities for training and rehabilitation.

¹ Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting, but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

3. Key points

3.1 Main findings

Safety

- In the Board view Thorn Cross remains safe, with low levels of violence and relatively low levels of self-harm.
- Illicit items continued to be brought in and found, with a new trend of unregulated weight loss injections.
- There was a significant increase in the number of men needing support, reflecting the change in the cohort of men being deemed suitable for the open estate.

Fair and humane treatment

- The kitchen is inadequate for the size of the prison and experienced problems with equipment failures.
- Relationships observed between men and the staff are good natured and supportive.
- The residential units would benefit from investment.

Health and wellbeing

- The healthcare provision was good, with access to a wide range of services.
- Support for those with drug and alcohol addictions is excellent, offering a range of drop-in services and therapeutic groups to aid recovery.
- Mental health support remains a priority to the prison. Engagement in services from prisoners is improving, but challenges continue.

Progression and resettlement

- The prison maintains a strong rehabilitative culture with excellent figures for accommodation and employment on release.
- Some education courses have been cut because of cuts to the provision.
- There has been success in raising the level of attainment in English and mathematics.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- When will the new CCTV system be installed? (4.5.4)
- Will a smoking ban be implemented across the open estate? (6.2.3)
- Will a minimum time be introduced that a prisoner must serve in a closed prison before transfer to the open estate? (7.3.3)
- When will the results of the trial of in-cell phones in the open estate be known? (7.4.2)

TO THE GOVERNOR

- How will the effectiveness of the increased use of CSIPS (Challenge, Support, and Intervention Plans, used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence) be assessed? (4.2.1)

- What steps will be taken to ensure the prison does not run out of drug testing kits? (4.5.3)
- What steps are to be taken to reduce the number of late arrivals, considering the associated health risks? (6.1.8)
- When will the mental health team be given a telephone? (6.3.4)
- Is there a costed plan to return the gym/sports hall to full use and to promote team sports? (6.5.3)

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress
What plans are there to reduce the number of men serving an indeterminate sentence?	A refreshed IPP action plan aims to ensure there are effective sentence plans that result in safe and sustainable release. There is a dedicated unit for men serving long sentences, which provides life skills courses, wellbeing sessions and peer support, funded by the prison.	The number of men serving IPP sentences continues to fall as a result of legislative changes and changes to the recall system for men on licence.
When will the coverage provided by CCTV be improved?	£12,500 has already been spent on repairs and upgrades. A full site upgrade has now been approved and work is expected to begin before the end of the financial year.	Work was not yet started on the new system and although the work is programmed for 2026-27 there is no start date and no way can be found to obtain one.
What plans are there to introduce in-cell telephones?	A pilot into the use of mobile PIN phones is to take place.	A trial at another open prison is being closely followed but the outcomes are not yet known and this remains an aspiration at Thorn Cross.
What plans are there to replace the Sycamore course with another restorative justice programme?	Men who wish to access restorative justice may ask their offender manager who will signpost them to appropriate services. Research has shown that programmes that focus on victim empathy are ineffective.	Men continue to be able to access restorative programmes via their offender manager.
What is being done to reduce the number of	Men are expected to arrive with a seven day	Only two men arrived without their medication

men who arrive without their medication?	supply and are seen immediately by healthcare. Where the process is not followed an incident report is logged and followed up.	during the reporting year. Appropriate measures were put in place to ensure continuing care. This is a significant improvement on the last reporting year when around five such incidents per month were reported.
A new building was almost complete, then it had to be demolished because there were so many faults with it. What lessons have been learnt to prevent this happening again?	Technical assurance teams carry out more frequent visits and project meetings are held more often. When the project is complete a 'lessons learned' exercise will take place.	The replacement building was completed in February but was only occupied in late April because of protracted contractual issues.
How is the work of the unit for men serving long sentences to be evaluated?	Regular forums take place to gather the experiences of the men living there. Any returns to closed conditions are monitored to establish trends and they will continue to be monitored through links with HMP Buckley Hall.	The number of men returned to closed prisons from the unit for men serving long sentences is in line with the rest of the prison population. Other data shows that the unit is managed well and the men benefit from it. Our monitoring supports this.
What plans are there to ensure there are adequate numbers of skilled cleaners?	All internal work placements, along with the play policy, are currently under review.	There are sufficient cleaners in place and regular monitoring reports frequently note the cleanliness of the residential units.
Are the current arrangements for prisoner consultation through consultative committees and the Queensland meeting as effective as they could be?	The process has been reviewed with all representatives meeting together on a monthly basis and meeting with the Governing Governor every third month to address any unresolved matters with the aim of having a clearer process and clearer decision making.	The meetings have been taking place regularly and those observed are well attended and operate in a similar way to the previous consultative committee. Further monitoring is needed to determine their effectiveness long term.
What plans are there to increase the opening hours of the gym at evenings and weekends?	This is currently being reviewed and will be offered if possible. The men currently have more	The gym has been closed eight weekends during the reporting year

	recreational PE than the minimum and there is one less PE Instructor than there should be.	because of a lack of staffing.
What steps have been put in place to ensure that men are not incorrectly released?	Additional assurance checks have been built into the process where every man's release process is checked by two managers at different points.	There was no one released in error during the reporting year, despite further early release schemes.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

Safety and security remain a priority to the prison, with enhanced risk meetings and safety intervention meetings held weekly. A monthly meeting is held that brings together safer custody, security and the drug strategy. There are two clear safety objectives-

- To disrupt and deter the conveyancing of illicit substances into HMP Thorn Cross.
- To effectively manage the risk (or any escalation of risk) of prisoners located at Thorn Cross.

Contingency exercises during the reporting year have included a hostage taking, an unauthorised walk (which was repeated as it failed) and a drone incursion. Following a security review a plan is in place to install a turnstile at the prison gate to allow closer monitoring of those entering the establishment.

4.1 Reception and induction

4.1.1 During the reporting year there continued to be a regular intake of new prisoners. Some of the men continue to arrive late in the day, however this has improved from previous years. It has been observed by the Board that many of the men arriving this reporting year at Thorn Cross have served relatively short periods in closed conditions prior to moving to open conditions.

4.1.2 Induction arrangements are regularly reviewed and aim for closer observation of the men in their first few weeks. New arrivals continue to mainly be placed on a small unit, which allows close monitoring and support to be provided to ensure prisoners can adjust to open conditions.

4.1.3 Prisoner feedback regarding the induction process is generally good and many men report to the Board that they are pleased to be at Thorn Cross.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

4.2.1 There have been four incidents of self-harm during this reporting year. The number of ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork, used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) documents opened remains relatively low, but there has been a slight increase.

Thorn Cross has seen a significant increase in the use of CSIPs which has been attributed to an increase in training for staff, because staff are encouraged to open them as a supportive measure. During the reporting year, 46 CSIPs were opened (five related to bullying; 10 related to mental health support; 27 because of vulnerability and four because of violence). The rise in self-harm, CSIPs and ACCTs may well reflect the change in the cohort of men being deemed suitable for category D establishments. There are currently 10 members of staff ACCT assessor trained. ACCT and CSIP documentation are regularly reviewed.

Period	May 23- April 24	May 24- April 25	May 25- April 26
Number of self-inflicted deaths	0	0	0
Number of self-harm incidents	0	0	4
Number of deaths in custody	0	0	1
Number of ACCTs opened	1	5	10
Number of CSIPs	0	21	46

4.2.2 Unfortunately, one death in custody occurred at Thorn Cross in August 2025. At present it is thought that the death was due to natural causes; however, a full Coroner's inquest is awaited.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

4.3.1 The level of violent incidents at Thorn cross remains consistently low, with no prisoner on staff assaults. There were no incidents of self-isolation. From the Board's observations these outcomes reflect a positive, respectful culture, between the men and staff, alongside a stable, predictable regime.

Period	May 2023 – April 2024	May 2024 – April 2025	May 2025- April 2026
No. of incidents of bullying	0	3	5
No. self-isolating for own protection	0	0	0
No. of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults	1	4	4
No. of assaults on staff	0	0	0

4.4 Use of force

4.4.1 The use of force continues to fall and reflects an active policy by the prison to only apply cuffs in extreme cases.

Period	May 2023 – April 2024	May 2024 – April 2025	May 2025 – April 2026
Total number of use of force incidents	52	25	21
Number of uses of force to prevent escape during escort	52	15	9
Number of uses of force due to non-compliance by a prisoner	0	4	4

4.4.2 Control and restraint, rigid bar cuffs, and PAVA (an incapacitant spray) training continues to be good with over 97% of staff up to date with training.

4.4.3 There are 42 body worn video cameras (BWVCs) available to staff. A minimum of 14 are carried each day, with all wing officers required to carry one.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

4.5.1 Improving detection and disrupting the supply of illicit items remained a key intelligence objective to the prison. There is a continued drive to improve the quality and quantity of intelligence reports from staff, with an aim to receive at least 200 intelligence reports from staff per month.

4.5.2 Mandatory drug tests (MDT) continue within the establishment. Reception MDTs were introduced as a new initiative in January 2025 and now all men have an MDT within 48 hours of arrival. This is partly to highlight drug usage from sending prisons and to allow Thorn Cross to offer prompt drug support to any prisoner testing positive. The number of MDTs performed this reporting year has risen significantly, largely due to reception testing. Even with the removal of reception testing MDT positive rates have fallen this reporting year.

MDTs	Number of tests May 2024- April 2025	Number of positives May 2024- April 2025	Number of tests May 2025- April 2026	Number of positives May 2025- April 2026
Reception tests- Introduced January 2025	89	21	315	32
Random tests	260	43	263	23
Suspicion tests	39	28	66	31
Risk tests	108	19	74	10
Test totals	496	111	718	96

4.5.3 Cocaine, ketamine and cannabis were the most widely detected illicit drugs on MDTs. Both cocaine and ketamine are more rapidly metabolised than other illicit drugs and so it is thought the men choose these, as there is a lower risk of a positive drug test. Intelligence reports, along with drug finds, suggest that steroid misuse is highly prevalent; in the month of April 2026 the only illicit drugs found on the estate were steroids. Finds this year have changed and have started to include unregulated

weight loss injections and injections of 'alluvi glow', a research drug that purports to regenerate skin and muscle tissue. A new concerning trend of prescription medication diversion is appearing, particularly in relation to pregabalin, which is being detected regularly on MDT tests.

Positive drug testing is assessed on an individual basis, and a personalised assessments form the basis of action and does not automatically result in a return to closed conditions. Support is widely offered through drug and alcohol support services. An incentivised substance free living (ISFL) unit has been open for the last two years, which aims to aid men with a history of drug use to remain drug free. To be eligible for this unit the men must agree to twice monthly drug testing. Unfortunately, there has been an issue with the supply of the drug testing kits and as a result the men have not been tested regularly.

In an effort to reduce drug use in the prison, the tariffs relating to a positive MDT test are reviewed monthly and increased if deemed necessary. This has resulted in a significant drop in proven adjudications for positive MDTs.

4.5.4 Illicit items continue to be found on a very regular basis from a combination of ad hoc finds, targeted searches from intelligence reports and random searches, which includes the use of sniffer dogs. Mobile phones and drugs are regularly found on site. There have been numerous requests from the prison over the last few years for a review of and refit of CCTV cameras, this is on hold due to financial constraints.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

5.1.1 Most of the accommodation is of a reasonable standard in the Board's view and predominately single occupancy. On arrival men are placed in double occupancy cells, which are small. Time spent on this unit varies with priority being given to men serving life or IPP sentences to move onto other units sooner. This can lead to some disquiet amongst the other men, however they are seldom on this unit for longer than a month and although they usually continue having a shared cell on another unit, the rooms are much larger. This second unit is also a temporary move though increasing numbers of men are choosing to stay in double occupancy (shared) cells, giving the unit a more settled feel. There is a sense of ownership and, subsequently, it is cleaner and better maintained. One temporary unit has 44 single rooms, each with its own en-suite and heating. These were introduced during Covid, with planning permission for 12 weeks. This has never been extended and, with retrospective planning permission refused, they must be removed by July 2027. The loss of these 44 beds will be absorbed by natural turnover with no new admissions until the lost beds are accounted for. Hot water and showers continue to be an issue across all units with frequent failures that appear slow to resolve.

5.1.2 The ISFL and another unit, dedicated to men who are nearing the end of lengthy, sometimes life or indeterminate, sentences who are likely to find the transition to release more problematic, are proving successful and popular.

5.1.3 A recent fire inspection moved all cooking equipment into the serveries, which appears to have been accepted. However, the same survey resulted in the removal of non-compliant bedding, curtains and mattresses, this was resented as it occurred very rapidly leaving some men without the bedding they had brought in or purchased. Following representations from the men a more reasonable approach was adopted by the prison.

5.1.4 The units are usually reasonably clean and tidy. Cleaners are poorly paid, and recruitment remains problematic. The unit with men nearing the end of long sentences consistently looks cleaner and better cared for, presumably, it is regarded more as a home with a sense of ownership and pride by prisoners. All units are looking tired, and the governing governor is looking at the possibility of deep cleaning and some decorating in line with an increased focus on cleanliness and decency.

5.1.5 There has been no progress on a new kitchen, which is linked to the provision of extra accommodation being provided with the arrival of rapid deployment cells. As these are not going to be provided and accommodation is being lost with 44 beds being removed, how the kitchen is to be improved is not known to the Board at the time of writing. There are frequent equipment failures and the need to hire in equipment such as freezers is inconvenient and expensive. Some of the food trolleys that were in a poor state of repair have been replaced. With the introduction of the food in prisons policy 2026 there have been changes in the menu to incorporate the required decrease in animal protein, sugar and salt. After some initial unhappiness this appears to be settling, although there was an increase in food wastage observed by the Board, which needs addressing. The kitchen staff have been nominated for a 'national catering team of the year' award, the first prison catering team to do so.

5.1.6 The issue of men working outside of the prison and not returning in time for set meals has not been entirely resolved. There seemed to be some mixed messages from staff given to men on what can and cannot be brought back into the prison after work and where it can be consumed. Discussions started during the reporting year that may lead to a prison shop being opened, which will mean the men can buy food inside the prison.

5.2 Segregation

5.2.1 As an open prison Thorn Cross does not have a care and separation unit. Instead, there are four cells at one end of unit 6, men who are placed there are to be returned to the closed estate, usually within four hours. The number of prisoners returned to a closed prison in the reporting year has remained stable with the main reasons being repeated use of illicit items such as drugs and mobile phones and where attempts to work with the prisoner have failed. Assaults and matters of public protection result in immediate return.

5.2.2 The number of adjudications in 2025-26 was 484, a small drop from 518 in 2024-2025 reporting year. An audit of adjudication outcomes by the IMB continues to show a consistent approach and outcome.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

5.3.1 Interactions between the men and the staff have been observed regularly and remain constructive, polite and frequently good humoured. The Board have observed a strong rehabilitative culture at Thorn Cross.

5.3.2 Last year, we reported that arrangements for the Queensland meetings (usually referred to as the prison council) appeared 'haphazard'. This year, they are much improved, with meetings taking place monthly and being chaired by the Deputy Governor or the Governing Governor. They are well attended, and minutes are available, providing an opportunity to discuss all aspects of prison life.

5.4 Equality and diversity

5.4.1 There were a variety of events such as Black history month, veteran's day, autism awareness month observed.

5.4.2 Men can report incidents of discrimination via a discrimination incident reporting form. One was received in the last reporting year with a man reporting unfair treatment by a staff member. A member of the IMB acts as the independent reviewer for such complaints.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

5.5.1 A new chaplain was appointed during the reporting year, replacing the longstanding chaplain who had retired. There have been some minor changes to the chaplaincy area making more dedicated space areas for different worship groups.

5.5.2 Ramadan was celebrated with additional prayer sessions and food being prepared by the men and available at sunset. These efforts were well received by the men.

5.6 Incentives schemes

5.6.1 The 'ambassador' scheme, which aims to reward men beyond the enhanced level of the incentives scheme, is being re-evaluated. Almost all the men who arrive at Thorn Cross have achieved enhanced status. To attain ambassador level, the men must go above and beyond and be actively serving the Thorn Cross community through voluntary work. This has caused difficulties for men working on ROTL (release on temporary license) as they find it hard to contribute to the "in house" community.

5.7 Complaints

5.7.1 Nearly all complaints are answered within the set time, and replies are actively chased when this doesn't happen. 163 complaints were received this year. 20% of these were quality assured by the head of business assurance. Replies to the complaints which the Board have observed were courteous and in appropriate language. Applications (prisoners' written submissions to the IMB) remain low with 19 this reporting year, which suggest complaints are being appropriately dealt with. The Board continues to find no link between the men who submit a complaint and those who are returned to closed conditions.

5.8 Property

5.8.1 Men who are returned to closed conditions leave Thorn Cross quickly and there often isn't enough time for staff to gather their property and send it with them. The number of applications the Board receives about property has seen a steady decline over the years. The men's property is stored safely and is accessible to them when they are on ROTL.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

6.1.1 Practice Plus Group is the lead healthcare provider and, in the Board's view, the quality of healthcare continues to be good. This is evidenced by the very small number of complaints (three over the reporting year) and the positive feedback from our monitoring.

6.1.2 Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust provides the mental health service, shared with HMP Risley. Drug and alcohol rehabilitation is provided by the substance misuse service (SMS) with time for teeth providing dental services.

6.1.3 Primary staffing levels are slightly above comparable prisons. Regular agency staff are used to fill vacancy shortfalls to minimise any impact on clinical services.

6.1.4 The local delivery board meets every quarter to assess and evaluate provision. Actions are robustly followed up. The meeting includes representation from the prison's health sectors and is regularly observed by the IMB.

6.1.5 Thorn Cross does not have its own dispensing pharmacy with medications received from HMP Risley. A pharmacist attends the prison one day a week alongside a full-time pharmacy technician. Medicines are administered three times a day.

6.1.6 A high proportion of men manage their own prescription medications. This is good practice, increasing independence, engagement and saving staff time. The pharmacist carries out regular medicine reviews. Not all prisoners have access to storage cabinets for their medications.

6.1.7 Men arriving at Thorn Cross have a first and second reception screening within 72 hours of arriving. Healthcare follows an 'early days in custody' process, that ensures health needs are identified and prisoners know how to access healthcare and support.

6.1.8 The number of late transfers is increasing. Men arriving outside of healthcare's normal opening hours do not receive their first screening until the following day. This can put men at risk, as exemplified by one man who arrived with pneumonia and deep vein thrombosis and was urgently sent to hospital the following day. In the last quarter, there were 53 incidents recorded by healthcare, of which 39 were due to late transfers.

6.2 Physical healthcare

6.2.1 GP sessions are run four times a week and wait times are good, typically between five to 10 days for non-urgent cases. Urgent referrals are seen on the same day. A nurse triaging system was introduced last year to improve efficiencies and an advanced nurse practitioner can also prescribe medicines.

6.2.2 Men have access to a range of additional health professionals including a physiotherapist, dietician, podiatrist and optician. Further services include ultrasounds, diabetic retinal screenings, X-rays and abdominal aortic aneurysm screening.

6.2.3 The Board would welcome a smoking ban across the open estate as men are concerned at the ease with which they can access smoking. This includes being able to buy tobacco off the canteen list and being provided with tobacco or vapes in their reception welcome pack. The health and social care needs assessment 2026 identified 26% of Thorn Cross men as smokers. Should a smoking ban be implemented the Board acknowledge support would be required.

6.2.4 The take up for vaccinations remains low. For covid-19 vaccinations take-up was between 26% and 31% of the population and for flu take-up was less than 8% of the population. Due to high rates of men not attending their appointments, eligible men are now written to asking if they would like an appointment. Findings from prison focus groups suggest misinformation around vaccine side-effects and vaccine fatigue continue to have an impact on vaccine take-up. Our monitoring supports this.

6.2.5 Non-attendance at appointments remained high, ranging from 12% to 31% during the reporting year. A new system of peer mentors visiting units to issue appointment slips personally is encouraging men to come or cancel and re-book appointments.

6.2.6 For those who fit the criteria, 're-connect' meetings are available to support vulnerable men 12 weeks prior to release, and up to 12 months post-release. As necessary, staff register men with a GP and forward medical information, as well as provide a minimum of seven days' medication to take with them when they leave prison.

6.2.7 The dental provision is good, as reflected in men's positive feedback, with no complaints recorded this year. Attendance for dental appointments is relatively high, helped by men being given future appointments at their first appointment. The longest wait time for an initial appointment is now reported around 15 weeks. The dentist works two days a week and a hygienist works one day a week.

6.3 Mental health

6.3.1 Mental health continues to be prioritised and is a developing provision, with investment in staffing and increases in hours on-site. Last year, mental health was re-branded 'wellbeing' to reduce stigma and increase engagement. Although improving, challenges still remain in terms of prisoner engagement.

6.3.2 Thorn Cross is following the trend of other open prisons, with numbers of men with identified mental health problems on the increase, 53% of the population in 2021 to 70% of the population in 2025 (298 prisoners). However, only around 33 (14%) of those 298 prisoners were on the mental health team caseload, despite an increase in referrals from healthcare and positive user feedback.

6.3.3 Rates of men not attending mental health appointments remained high (30% from June to November 2025) The team are endeavouring to improve this, trialling visiting men prior to their appointments and again afterwards if an appointment is not kept. Men still speak of prioritising work over mental health appointments. The number of men who reported mental health issues (anxiety, depression etc) to us during our visits is not reflected in the relatively low numbers accessing mental health services.

6.3.4 The team moved to an office based in one of the residential units over a year ago and are still without a telephone, making communication difficult. They provide a

presence five days a week and work flexibly to ensure cover for the evening. Weekend cover is provided remotely from HMP Risley, which can limit the support on offer for those men who work full-time, although someone will attend if requested.

6.3.5 The mental health team has a range of specialist staff, including a high-intense CBT therapist, psychological wellbeing practitioners and a new prison community navigator, whose role is to act as a bridge between prison healthcare services and community resources. A newly appointed nurse specialising in neurodiversity provides early assessment/screenings for ADHD and autism in her monthly clinic.

6.3.6 There is a listeners team of 10 prisoners, supported by the Samaritans, who visit the prison every couple of weeks. To enhance visibility, listeners now have stickers for use on units and cell doors, to denote who and where they are.

6.3.7 'Intuitive thinking' and the 'big life group' offer group-based interventions five days a week and on some evenings, such as the sleep well group, ADHD group and meditation group. Wellbeing events are held throughout the year and are well-advertised.

6.3.8 The mental health team now has a dedicated community hub room on the communal concourse and next to the gym, to encourage men to drop in and chat. Here men can access mentors daily.

6.4 Social care

6.4.1 The prisoners have access to appropriate social care support as required provided by Warrington Borough Council when needed.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

6.5.1 Men can be out of their rooms for 12 hours a day and report their appreciation of the attractive outside environment and more specifically the beneficial effects it has on their mental health.

6.5.2 The gym continues to be a valuable, popular resource for the men and an incentive for good behaviour. It is typically open seven days a week with evening opening Monday to Thursday and frequent weekend opening.

6.5.3 In order to promote a good work ethic, men are only allowed to access the gym once a day. Nevertheless, men have more gym access than national guidelines require. Changes made to the gym timetable caused complaints with men working late shifts, as they felt disadvantaged. The current timetable is due to be reviewed based on this feedback.

6.5.4 With 50% of the sports hall used for fitness equipment, the range of team sporting activities available to the men is limited, and therefore so is participation. The Board believes men would benefit from more team sport events. Staff are aware of this issue and considering options (including returning to a full functioning sports hall) within tight financial restraints.

6.5.5 In terms of team sports, the sports field is an underused resource. Encouragingly an inter-unit football match was held this spring and was a great success. Matches are to continue weekly, creating a prison unit football league.

6.5.6 Gym instructor courses have finally started this reporting year, delivered by the prison gym staff and with around 10 men on the course. These courses will equip the men with qualifications to help them gain employment on release.

6.5.7 Throughout the year, PE staff offer many varied activities that are popular with both staff and men, including weight management and healthy lifestyle sessions, running clubs, circuits, 'wellbeing' walks, team and racket sports and the option to attend park runs in the community. A recent charity bike-a-thon was a great success, and three staff members have signed up to the cycle leadership awards to take groups of staff and prisoners on community bicycle rides. Prisoners will be able to use bicycles from the bikes workshop.

6.5.8 Working closely with healthcare and SMS and in support of the prison's drug strategy, the gym has run two steroid awareness sessions this year. Gym sessions for neurodiverse prisoners were started last year and continue to be offered twice weekly for those men who do not feel able to attend regular gym slots.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

6.6.1 The substance misuse service (SMS) is situated within the healthcare building, promoting integrated recovery interventions across healthcare and its partner agencies whilst continuing to provide an excellent service for the prisoners. Most SMS referrals come from the offender management unit (OMU), but also induction, the wellbeing team and MDT, as well as self-referrals.

6.6.2 The prison's new drug strategy promotes recovery. A range of drop-in services and therapeutic groups are offered, which are well attended. Evening narcotics anonymous and alcoholics anonymous sessions are available twice weekly, as well as mutual aid sessions. Men who struggle to engage in group sessions are offered one-to-one support. A mentor supported drop-in café and chat service is popular. Service user forums continue to be held bi-monthly, and men can participate in 'recovery walks' in the countryside.

6.6.3 Cocaine, cannabis and alcohol are the top three substances at assessment for recovery support. 12 men are currently using clinical services to support dependency and are on either methadone, Buvidal or espranor.

6.6.4 The core recovery programme is peer-led. More men are arriving at Thorn Cross having spent a shorter amount of time in the closed estate than previously. Staff acknowledge that this may increase the number of referrals to SMS and result in changes to the course content.

6.6.5 There are currently two part-time drug and alcohol support peer mentors and three recovery champions. Mentors and champions are proactive in promoting the SMS across the prison, providing drop-in support, delivering induction programmes and getting involved in other harm reduction initiatives e.g. speaking at events within drug and alcohol recovery week. T-shirts have been printed to help men better identify SMS mentors.

6.6.6 SMS works closely with the independent substance free living (ISFL) unit where, in line with the new drug and alcohol framework, regular testing is used as a motivational tool to promote recovery and support rather than being used in a punitive way. Men who fail drug testing are offered the chance to engage with SMS support. Random drug testing is now being used to ensure men cannot predict drug

testing. On at least one occasion, there have been problems with swab test availability from the external provider Branston. Tests have had to be donated from another prison.

6.6.7 The SMS provides support for prisoners on release by supporting them in booking appointments and making contacts with recovery agencies in the community. This 'on release' support also includes prescriptions and the provision of a naloxone (medication used to reverse opioid overdoses) kit if required.

6.7 Soft skills

6.7.1 Opportunities for the men to improve their soft skills include a wide range of opportunities to work in the community, and many internal roles on offer. For example working in customer service roles in the concourse café, farm shop and staff mess, developing interpersonal skills in the mentor's office and OMU front desk, developing communication and presentation skills as prisoner representatives at prison forums and meetings, and listening and communication skills as listeners, ambassadors and mentors.

6.7.2 The peer mentor scheme works across the establishment in areas such as drug support, mental health and induction and is valued by both staff and men. Peer mentors consistently tell us how rewarding they find the role and the positive impact it has on their self-esteem and confidence.

6.7.3 The theatre company, TIPP productions, has visited the prison, providing men with the opportunity to explore expressive performance and acting.

6.7.4 The wellbeing/mental health team offer group sessions looking at 'healthy minds' and promoting intuitive thinking, emotional regulation, assertion and resilience.

6.7.5 'Life skill' classes in the education department aim to give men the knowledge and confidence to manage independent living. Classes include finance and cookery, but also public speaking and growth mindsets.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

7.1.1 The library continues to go from strength to strength with the staff continually generating new ideas to encourage new readers, with monthly themed events. There was a seamless change to the new provider with the management now on site.

7.1.2 Throughout the year, imposed provision constraints have led to the closure of joinery, brickwork, art and media studies courses. New course provision includes forklift truck driving, as well as a life skills course, which focuses on more general skills for home life, for example skills for moving house.

7.1.3 Men are assessed on arrival and have individual pathways to improve their attainment where necessary in English and mathematics. Following intervention 85% of men have achieved Level 1 and 2 in mathematics and English.

7.2 Vocational training, work

7.2.1 The target of 300 men out of a population of 429 working outside of the prison proved to be too challenging and was changed by prison management part way through the reporting year. At the end of the reporting year, 190 prisoners were in external paid employment and an average of around 20 men in community-based voluntary work. The opportunity to have paid employment in the community plays a significant part in men's successful reintegration into society.

7.2.2 The prison has been able to build relationships with national employers, which has enabled some men to continue their employment on release, as well as provide work that hopefully leads to a possible career path. However, three companies are no longer employing men because their behaviour was unsatisfactory or in the case of one employer, they could not meet the necessary requirements for employing serving prisoners.

7.2.3 Of the men undertaking voluntary work, some are involved in projects with local wildlife trusts at Brockholes and Bolton, while others work with Cheshire Dogs Home, as well as locally in the village hall and church grounds.

7.2.4 Within the prison men are also placed in paid roles, in the farms, gardens, as cleaning staff, with Max Spielman, Remade with Hope, Timpsons and in the bikes workshop. Farms and gardens continue to be a huge success, where men are growing bedding plants for the planters and baskets that provide colour around the estate. Produce is grown primarily for use within the kitchen and currently includes; cabbages, tomatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, chillies, cucumbers and potatoes. The orchard provides abundant stocks of apples and pears. All produce is grown from seed in polytunnels and any excess produce is donated to local schools. Men appear to enjoy work here hugely and all progress to recognised qualifications, with 35 men recently gaining qualifications in use of mowers, hedge cutters, leaf blowers and vacuums. These are required for men to gain employment post release.

7.3 Offender management, progression

7.3.1 As we reported last year, the long awaited new OMU building was built, however shortly after it had to be demolished as there were so many faults with it, leaving staff continuing to work in totally unsuitable conditions. The replacement building was complete and then sat empty for months as there were protracted

disputes over the warranty. The response to last year's report includes a request that a lessons learnt exercise be carried out, as the Board hope they will to help prevent wasted time and public money in future. The new building supports a team friendly approach where staff can share ideas, as well as providing multiple one-to-one room spaces to ensure private meeting and interview space are available to support the prisoners.

7.3.2 At the end of the reporting year the OMU team started face to face ROTL (release on temporary licence) meetings. Whilst outcomes won't change, this new approach should bring an increased level of understanding and transparency. Hopefully, the men will understand when they will be allowed home leave and if they can't return to their home area, why that is and what alternative arrangements will be put in place. The men will also have explained to them that whilst they have an entitlement to ROTL, that does not mean an immediate licence. Appropriate risk assessments still need to be progressed. Although the Board receives few applications, most continue to be about sentence management (nine out of 19).

7.3.3 As of mid-March, nearly 25% of the prison population had been in prison for less than six months before being transferred to the open estate. This means that they have had very little intervention and education and there are concerns that the men who are transferring may not be ready for open conditions and may not have completed courses and programmes only available in the closed estate, which are designed to aid and support rehabilitation.

7.3.4 The length of time men can spend in an open prison before release has been increasing and has now reached five years. Currently there are 40 men with five years of their sentence left to serve (including 23 men with longer sentences, who are expected to be released on parole during the next five years). This means that the prison has to give more thought to career planning for those men.

7.4 Family contact

7.4.1 Thorn Cross continues to ensure that visits are as family oriented as possible with the newly re-opened café serving drinks and food, themed days are organised and children can enjoy the garden and toys. ROTL enables men to maintain family ties, enhancing rehabilitation. For men who do not get regular visits, support is provided by the prison and by groups run by prisoners. These men are also discussed at prison safety intervention meetings and by the chaplaincy team.

7.4.2 IMB visits, especially those in the early evening, highlighted the lack of phones for the men to call home and speak to their family, especially young children at bedtime. The prison has a single shared phone on each wing with regular queuing and many men missing the opportunity to speak to their loved ones. The situation is regularly worsened as a result of a phone being out of order and men having to queue in other residential units. This has regularly been raised by the Board to the prison governors.

7.4.3 Work continues to support men being released and ensuring they are appropriately housed on their first night away from custody, which is mainly with family members or in approved premises.

7.5 Resettlement planning

7.5.1 To the Board, the men appeared prepared well for their release. They were supported in opening bank accounts and recent data shows that 100% of men had accommodation at the start of release. The Department for Work and Pensions have an employee based in the employment hub to support men who need to apply for benefits. Job vacancies are displayed, with the men guided through the application process. It is unfortunate that prisoners who arrive with only a few weeks of their sentence remaining may not benefit from this detailed planning, nor will they benefit from the rehabilitative culture of the prison.

7.5.2 Men are on a 'pathway' from the time they come to Thorn Cross and this aids resettlement. At the end of the reporting year, 60% of the men were still in employment six weeks after release (three with the employer they had worked with whilst in prison) and 60% after six months. Both these figures are significantly above the target set by the Prison Service.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	9
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	7
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	8
Total number of visits to the establishment	201

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	1
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	0	0
C	Equality	0	1
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	3	1
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	0	2
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	0	1
F	Food and kitchens	1	0
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	1	0
H1	Property within the establishment	1	0
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	4	1
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	0	0
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	8	9
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	0	0
K	Transfers	1	1
L	Miscellaneous	0	1
	Total number of applications	24	18



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