



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board
HMP/YOI Thorn Cross
Arley Road
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 4RL

August 2025

Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI THORN CROSS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 1 MAY 2024 – 30 APRIL 2025**

Thank you for submitting your Board's annual report on HMP/YOI Thorn Cross. I am grateful for the care and dedication with which you and your colleagues fulfil this important role and I would be pleased if you could pass on my thanks to all members of the Board.

I note the Board's concerns regarding men serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. These sentences pose some of the most complex challenges in our system and I am mindful of the frustration they continue to cause for those subjects to them and their families.

In July 2025 the Government published a refreshed IPP Action Plan, which sets measurable targets and focuses on strong frontline delivery across prisons and probation. This ensures those serving IPP sentences have clear, effective sentence plans and are located in prisons best suited to their rehabilitative needs. The Action Plan is a key tool to help men reduce risk and progress towards safe release. This national work is complemented by the dedicated unit at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross, where IPP and life-sentence prisoners benefit from enhanced provision. This includes weekly life skills classes delivered by Novus, enrichment activities such as wellbeing walks and peer-led sessions and access to a CV suite. I am also pleased to note the Governor's plans to build further on this support, including through a bid for innovation funding. Taken together with the wider findings of the Independent Sentencing Review, these steps represent determined progress towards ensuring that IPP prisoners can work towards safe and sustainable release, while keeping public protection at the forefront.

I was encouraged to read your observations of daily life at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross. You highlight that interactions between staff and men are constructive, polite, good-humoured and that these relationships reflect the strong rehabilitative culture running through the establishment. It is equally reassuring to note the progress made with Naloxone provision where every unit is now stocked with nasal Naloxone, staff training has been expanded through "train the trainer" sessions and the prison has already seen this provision prove lifesaving. It is particularly welcome that men at risk are offered a Naloxone kit upon release, which demonstrates a clear commitment to preparing individuals for life beyond custody.

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

The Lord Chancellor and I greatly appreciate the contribution of Independent Monitoring Boards across the estate, and I thank you once again for the commitment shown to HMP/YOI Thorn Cross.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', written in a cursive style.

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending

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HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report

CTV coverage

£12,500 has already been spent this financial year on CCTV repairs and upgrades. While a previous capital bid was unsuccessful, HMP/YOI Thorn Cross has scoped self-funded improvements to replace and realign cameras in the most needed areas. In addition, a full site CCTV upgrade has now been approved nationally and is in development, with delivery expected to commence before the end of the financial year.

Replacement for the Sycamore Tree restorative justice programme

The Sycamore Tree programme was withdrawn nationally following review under the National Framework for Interventions, which sets evidence-based standards for all rehabilitative interventions. Both the internal panel and the Independent Correctional Service Advice and Accreditation Panel concluded that the programme did not meet the minimum threshold for approval. This decision was not linked to funding.

HMPPS nonetheless recognises the valuable role played by Prison Fellowship in supporting those in custody and we look forward to continuing our partnership with them through activities outside the Sycamore Tree programme. At present there is no direct national replacement for Sycamore Tree, as programmes with a primary focus on victim empathy have not been shown to reduce reoffending. However, if prisons identify a gap in provision supported by population needs data, they may explore local options provided these meet the national standards set out in the policy framework. In the meantime, men at HMP/YOI Thorn Cross who wish to access restorative justice can apply through their offender managers, who will signpost them to appropriate services.

Prisoners arriving without medication

The expectation is that prisoners are transferred with at least a seven-day supply of medication, though this is not always possible in circumstances such as court transfers. All new arrivals are seen immediately by healthcare staff, who take action to address urgent medical needs. Where the process is not followed, an incident report is logged by healthcare and followed up appropriately.

Lessons from the demolished building project

The original OMU building was demolished and rebuilt using alternative materials to prevent the issues previously experienced. This project caused avoidable inconvenience locally, delaying the move of the Offender Management Unit (OMU) into purpose-built accommodation and creating disruption to site operations and the surrounding community. To prevent recurrence, Technical Assurance teams now carry out more frequent visits and project meetings are held regularly to resolve challenges at an early stage. On completion, a comprehensive lessons-learned review will take place, including evaluation of multidisciplinary services, to strengthen future delivery.

In-cell telephony

HMPPS intends to pilot the use of mobile PIN phones in parts of the open estate where in-cell telephony is not available, subject to senior approval. Locally, BT has upgraded hardware and software to improve call quality and HMP/YOI Thorn Cross continues to report and resolve any PIN phone issues promptly.