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**HMP BIRMINGHAM –  
SOME IMPROVEMENTS, BUT CHALLENGES AHEAD**

HMP Birmingham was a safer and more decent place, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the West Midlands local jail. The prison did, however, need to focus on improving the work, training and education available for prisoners, and on its resettlement work.

HMP Birmingham is in many ways a typical inner-city local prison on a largely Victorian site. It holds the same sort of short-stay adult men with the wide range of needs and challenges found in any local prison. Untypically, in October 2011, it became the first public sector prison to transfer to the private sector and is now run by G4S. This inspection was not an assessment of whether that transfer was right or will be successful. It does, however, provide a useful benchmark against which some important aspects of the prison's future progress can be judged.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- for most prisoners, HMP Birmingham was reasonably safe;
- there had been six self-inflicted deaths in the two years since its last inspection in 2009, but none in 2011, which was encouraging;
- the use of force had dropped significantly;

- the prison was clean and relationships between prisoners and staff were generally good and very much improved, although black and minority ethnic prisoners reported worse relationships with staff than the prison population as a whole; and
- there was an excellent day care centre for older prisoners and others less able to cope on the main wings.

However, inspectors had some concerns:

- the prison was overcrowded, meaning many prisoners shared small cells with inadequately screened toilets;
- strategies for addressing bullying were weak;
- there was a high rate of positive drug tests and packages of drugs were regularly thrown over the wall into the yard;
- escort, reception and first night facilities required improvement: large groups of prisoners often arrived together and then had long waits in reception because the first night centre was not big enough to cope;
- the regime for vulnerable prisoners was unsatisfactory, with poor induction, harassment from other prisoners on the vulnerable prisoner wing, and poor access to a range of services;
- too few prisoners were engaged in useful activity, with a third of prisoners unemployed, while the leadership and management of learning and skills were weak; and
- work to reduce the likelihood of reoffending still had a long way to go and was insufficiently resourced, with very little for short-term and remand prisoners who made up almost half the population.

Nick Hardwick said:

“Birmingham prison has recently made some relatively simple but nonetheless important improvements but the prison also has a number

of significant strategic challenges it needs to resolve. It is a cleaner, safer and more decent place. However, first night and vulnerable prisoner arrangements are significant exceptions to that overall picture. Two important areas of the prison – purposeful activity and resettlement – are weak and a determined strategic effort is required to improve them.”

Michael Spurr, Chief Executive Officer of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has acknowledged the improvements achieved at Birmingham during a difficult period of market testing. This is to the credit of the previous Governor, management team and staff.

"G4S has successfully managed the transition from the public sector and I am confident that the Director and his team will rigorously address the issues raised in the report and drive forward sustained further improvement over the coming months."

ENDS

**Notes to Editors:**

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 21 June 2012 at [http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/prison-and-yoi?result\\_33497\\_result\\_page=B](http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/prison-and-yoi?result_33497_result_page=B)
2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. This announced inspection was carried out from 9-13 January 2012.
4. HMP Birmingham holds adult male prisoners, convicted and unconvicted, on category B and category C. There is also a small population of retained category D prisoners.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons Press Office on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick.