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020 7035 2123

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**HARMONDSWORTH IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE –
SOME PROGRESS, DESPITE EXPANSION, BUT MORE TO DO**

Harmondsworth had managed to maintain standards despite doubling in size, but significant improvements were still needed in some areas, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced inspection of the removal centre near Heathrow.

Previous inspections over recent years have recorded steady progress at Harmondsworth, after a second disturbance at the centre in 2006. At its last inspection in early 2010, this improvement had continued although the opening of new accommodation at that time raised the prospect of significant challenges as it meant that the centre was to double in size. At this inspection, we found some improvements had been sustained during a time of considerable change, but some concerns remained.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- Harmondsworth remained a reasonably safe institution, where staff dealt with incidents reasonably well;
- arrangements to support those at risk of self-harm were generally good;
- the promotion of and respect for diversity had improved and there was little evidence of tension between different groups;
- engagement between staff and detainees was reasonable; and

- the preparation of detainees for removal or release was reasonable, with some good welfare work from staff, and support from outside agencies.

About 10% of the population had been held in detention for over a year and the anxiety that flowed from this experience was palpable. Inspectors were therefore concerned to find that the ability to communicate with legal advisors or other support mechanisms, or to see on-site UK Border Agency staff was often limited.

Other concerns included:

- Rule 35 reports and responses to detainees who may have been the victims of torture or who were unfit to detain were often insufficient;
- much of the new accommodation had been built to prison specifications which was out of keeping with how detainees should be managed;
- health care received many complaints from detainees, but while some poor service was still evident, there were renewed efforts from managers and improvements beginning to be seen;
- provision of activity had failed to keep pace with the growth of the centre, so most detainees had too little to do; and
- the unacceptable practice of taking reserves to charter flight removals persisted.

Nick Hardwick said:

“Harmondsworth is now a bigger and more complex institution following a period of rapid change and expansion. Standards have been maintained in many areas despite the upheaval, and this is a considerable achievement that deserves recognition. However, the prison-like design of the new units is regrettable and such an environment will always be unsuitable for people held under immigration powers. Other areas gave us cause for significant concern,

including health care, activities and the management of detainees who might be unfit for detention. Improvements in these areas need to be sustained and accelerated.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 11 April 2012 at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/immigration-removal-centres>
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 unannounced full follow-up inspection was carried out from 14-25 November 2011.
4. Harmondsworth is an immigration removal centre for adult male detainees. It is located near Heathrow airport.
5. Please contact Stephanie Moor on 0207 035 2123 or Barbara Buchanan on 020 7035 2102 if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick.