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### **HMP STYAL – SOLID IMPROVEMENTS, BUT CONCERNS REMAIN**

HMP Styal continued to improve in many areas, but its specialist Keller Unit was not suitable for holding very seriously damaged and mentally ill women, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced follow-up inspection of the Cheshire women's prison.

Styal is one of the country's larger women's prisons, serving the north west of England. Like other large local women's prisons, Styal holds a wide range of prisoners, many with significant social needs and a wide range of vulnerabilities, including alcohol and drug problems. Some have severe mental health problems which often manifest in serious self-harm. Despite the significant challenges and constraints, the prison had responded well to meeting the needs of most women prisoners. It was a credit to the prison that for the first time, outcomes for women in the area of safety were reasonably good.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- there was good focus on individual risk: the overall level of self-harm had halved from 2009 to 2010 and women at very high risk received close attention, but more effective case management of others was also needed;

- there was no longer a large disparity of perceptions of safety between women who lived in the old, Victorian houses and on the purpose-built Waite wing;
- there was some good clinical support for women with substance use problems and the increasing number of women who arrived needing detoxification from alcohol;
- relationships between staff and prisoners were reasonably good;
- diversity work was well organised and there was particularly good support for women with disabilities;
- the mother and baby unit continued to provide excellent support;
- the quality of learning and skills provision was generally good and there were sufficient activities to occupy the population, an important factor in helping to keep vulnerable women safe; and
- a good range of services was provided for most resettlement pathways, and sentence planning and offender management work was good.

However, inspectors were concerned to find that:

- the Keller Unit was still not an appropriate environment for the small number of women held there, all of whom had serious mental health problems;
- while relatively few women were involved, managerial oversight of those held in segregated conditions and in special accommodation needed to be strengthened;
- there were too many women serving very short prison sentences; and
- primary mental health services were stretched and transfer under the Mental Health Act took too long.

Nick Hardwick said:

“Overall this was a positive inspection, and it was apparent that the upward curve of improvement in recent years had been maintained. However, there are two important caveats to this. The deaths of six women at Styal between 2002 and 2003 led to the commissioning of the review of vulnerable women in prison led by Baroness Corston. Published in 2007, it recommended a drastic reduction in the use of women’s imprisonment. It was therefore disappointing to find too many cases of women, some of whom were clearly mentally ill, serving very short prison sentences which served little purpose except to further disrupt sometimes already chaotic lives.

“Second, despite the best efforts of the staff at Styal, the Keller Unit remains a wholly unsuitable place to safely hold and manage very seriously damaged and mentally ill women. The staff I met on the Keller Unit were deeply impressive. Nevertheless, the circumstances of the women on the Keller Unit were more shocking and distressing than anything I have yet seen on an inspection. So long as these women remain in prison there is a need to ensure that they receive similar resources to those provided for the most disruptive men in close supervision centres in prisons to help women deal with the root causes of their problems in a suitable, safe and therapeutic environment.”

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

“Overall this is a very positive report that recognises the continuing improvements made by Styal since the last inspection and makes it clear that the prison is doing a good job of meeting the needs of the significant majority of the women in its care.

“The Governor and his staff are committed to building on the solid improvements identified in the inspection report. Styal is developing its care and resettlement pathways to reduce re-offending. NOMS and its partners including the National Health Service are committed to

enhancing the provision of care for those women with mental health and behavioural issues. The potential for provision of updated facilities to supplement or replace the Keller unit are being reviewed by NOMS.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors:**

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 20 January 2012 at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/prison-and-yoi-inspections/index.htm>
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 5-15 July 2011.
4. 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.