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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRISONS HAVE IMPROVED BUT ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORK AND REHABILITATION LAG BEHIND, SAYS CHIEF INSPECTOR

Offenders sent to prison following the recent disturbances in English cities will enter a system that has improved over the last few years - but too many will have to sit out their sentences with very little constructive to do and little input to prevent them reoffending, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing his first annual report.

The report charts improvement in the treatment of prisoners and the conditions in prisons over the past five years but progress has been inconsistent overall and progress on work and resettlement has been too slow.

The Chief Inspector said:

“The improvements in prisons over the last five years are very welcome. Nevertheless, going to even the best run prison for only a short time is a very severe punishment indeed. I have found no holiday camps. But for many short-term prisoners, the reality will be being locked up in a small shared cell with an unscreened toilet for twenty hours a day - with too much access to drugs and negative peer pressure and too little access to work and resettlement help.”

The report notes:

- most prisoners in most types of prisons report feeling safe and this was borne out by inspection findings;

- the integrated drug treatment system was having a positive impact where it had been introduced; and
- health care was generally improving.

But concerns remained about:

- too little work, training or education - particularly for young adults;
- inadequate resettlement support which was the worst performing area and a squeeze on small voluntary organisations who contribute to this;
- the unacceptably high availability of drugs despite efforts to combat this;
- the continuing high level of unmet mental health need in all forms of custody and particularly amongst women prisoners; and
- the negative perceptions of prisoners from minority groups, particularly Muslim prisoners.

Nick Hardwick said:

“Our current inspection programme has given us a good insight into how prisons are coping with the influx of prisoners resulting from the recent disturbances. There has been some disruption and stresses. It has been a challenge to keep young people safe in particular – both in the existing population and among new arrivals. There have been tensions between prisoners, some potentially serious incidents and significant numbers of young people placed on self-harm prevention procedures. It is a credit to the staff involved that there have not been more serious incidents.

“Although we have only looked at a small cross section of prisons and young offender institutions, up to now they have had the capacity to physically absorb the additional numbers. But capacity is more than just a question of how many prisoners can be squeezed into the available cells. The concern my report highlights is that there will not be sufficient capacity to do anything useful with many of them when they are there.”

In a year of change for the Inspectorate and the bodies it inspects, April 2010 to March 2011 saw 97 inspections of prisons, police custody suites,

immigration removal centres and other custodial establishments. Almost 95% of the recommendations made following an inspection were accepted and more than two thirds of our recommendations were at least partly achieved by the time of a follow-up inspection.

Inspections of immigration centres revealed a mixed picture although the report welcomes the intention to end the detention of children. Inspectors found improvements in police custody but were concerned that in some areas, there was ineffective use of schemes to divert those with mental health problems from police custody, and police cells were too frequently used for those who needed to be detained in a place of safety.

Other developments included:

- the inspectorate was asked to take on the inspection of court custody;
- the inspectorate continued to coordinate the work of the National Preventative Mechanism, a group of organisations which independently monitor all places of detention in accordance with the UK's obligation under the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT);
- the development of more outcome-based, less prescriptive inspection criteria for prisons and, with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, for police custody;
- proposals submitted at their invitation to the MOD for the inspection of UK detention facilities in Afghanistan; and
- work with Ofsted to develop explore joint arrangements for the inspection of Secure Training Centres.

The Chief Inspector said:

“This year we have built on the achievements of my predecessors and worked closely with our partner inspectorates to ensure we are in the best possible position to help drive improvement across all forms of custody. I am grateful for the constructive way that prisons and the other bodies we inspect respond to our findings and I hope the improvements we note in this report provide encouragement that the further improvements required can be achieved.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the annual report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 14 September 2011 at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/corporate-reports/hmi-prisons/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. The UK's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) was established under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment. The NPM consists of 18 existing bodies throughout the UK, which are independent and have the right regularly to inspect all places of detention. It is coordinated by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and reports to the UN treaty body.
4. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons Press Office on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1415 Monday to Friday if you would like more information or to request an interview with Nick Hardwick.