



19 September 2011

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00.01, WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2011

HMP CHELMSFORD – A TRANSFORMED PRISON

HMP Chelmsford was a fundamentally improved prison, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the Essex local jail.

Recent inspections have been heavily critical of the prison, and its inability to develop a positive culture. Chelmsford has to manage a range of risks and needs, including some challenging young adults, and the substance abusers, mentally ill and prolific offenders who populate most local prisons. It is commendable that the prison was now an essentially safe place and its approach had in many ways been transformed.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- violent incidents, particularly among young adults, had begun to reduce and violence reduction arrangements were excellent;
- security procedures were sound and levels of illicit drug use were relatively low;
- detoxification and drug treatment had improved;
- staff-prisoner relationships were much improved, supported by excellent communication arrangements;

- activity places had increased, learning and skills provision was well managed and there were some excellent opportunities to gain vocational qualifications; and
- there was good support for prisoners to find employment, training or education on release, address substance misuse and maintain family ties.

However, inspectors had some concerns:

- while those at risk of self-harm were generally well cared for, recording on self-harm prevention documentation required improvement; and
- some aspects of the strategic management of resettlement required further development and custody planning for the many short-term prisoners remained disjointed.

Nick Hardwick said:

“Over recent years, the Inspectorate has raised concerns about treatment and conditions at Chelmsford and about the prison’s inability to shrug off a negative and outdated culture. It is therefore hugely reassuring to find a senior management and staff group that has risen to the challenge and fundamentally improved the prison. As in any busy local prison many challenges remain, but Chelmsford is now an exemplar of the improvements that even a troubled prison can achieve with strong leadership, staff commitment and clear values.”

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

"This is a very positive report recording real progress and improvement made across a range of areas including safety, security, prisoner-staff relationships, purposeful activity and resettlement. I am pleased that HM Chief Inspector has commended the work undertaken by the

Governor and his staff and I know they will use the report's recommendations to improve the prison further."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 21 September 2011 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 announced inspection was carried out from 16-20 May 2011.
4. HMP Chelmsford is a category B local male prison and young offender institution.
5. 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.