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HMP WANDSWORTH – SERIOUS CONCERNS

The treatment of prisoners in HMP Wandsworth and the conditions in which they are held are now matters of serious concern, said Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced full follow-up inspection of the south London jail.

HMP Wandsworth is a large, Victorian prison which holds a challenging population with multiple problems, many of whom are only held for short periods. The last inspection of HMP Wandsworth was marred by an attempt to subvert the process by moving 'difficult' prisoners between Wandsworth and Pentonville so they were not present in either prison during the inspection. This overshadowed what would otherwise have been good progress in a prison that had been of concern for some time.

There was no attempt to subvert this inspection. However, progress had stalled and outcomes for prisoners were significantly worse. Inspectors were concerned by what appeared to be unwillingness among some staff to take responsibility for the problems the prison faced.

Inspectors were specifically concerned to find that:

- the level of self-harm and self-inflicted deaths were high;

- poor staff-prisoner relationships, the lack of a predictable regime, deficiency of association and insufficient activity contributed to feelings of isolation and alienation that might have led to self-harming;
- staff interactions with prisoners were frequently indifferent and sometimes abusive;
- victims of bullying behaviour were not adequately protected and processes to identify and respond to incidents and patterns of violent behaviour were ineffective;
- prisoners with mobility difficulties were located on landings which did not allow them access to showers;
- there was no strategy to meet the needs of foreign national prisoners and many were held beyond the end of their sentence;
- some prisoners were out of their cells for just two hours a day and association was often cancelled;
- there appeared to be little attempt in the segregation unit to tackle and resolve underlying reasons for prisoners' behaviour;
- black and minority ethnic prisoners were disadvantaged in significant areas of the prison; and
- the induction process was poor and many prisoners lacked basic knowledge about the routines and rules of the prison.

However, inspectors were pleased to find that:

- there were good training opportunities in the workshops, but the excellent Timpson workshop operated at well below capacity;
- the Jones Unit provided a high level of inpatient health care;
- mental health services were good and transfers to mental health units were not unduly delayed;
- few complaints were received about the food; and

- some good resettlement services were provided, particularly with accommodation, education, training and employment and substance misuse.

Nick Hardwick said:

“The treatment and conditions of simply too many prisoners at Wandsworth was demeaning, unsafe and fell below what could be classed as decent. I did not detect sufficient willingness in the prison to acknowledge and address these concerns. I hope the prison service management will now act decisively to reverse the prison’s decline.”

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

“This is a poor report. I took immediate and decisive action in March to address the concerns about safety at the prison and to strengthen the Senior Management Team following feedback about the inspection from HM Chief Inspector.

“A robust action plan is in place to address the recommendations in the report and managers and staff at the prison are in no doubt that they must improve performance. I visited the prison last week and I am satisfied that improvements are being made. We will continue to monitor progress and will deliver the improvements required.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 10 August 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 unannounced full follow-up inspection was carried out from 28 February – 4 March 2011.
4. HMP Wandsworth is a category B local prison for adult males servicing the courts.
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.