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**HMP DOVEGATE THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY – THERAPEUTIC WORK
SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED**

Though the therapeutic community within HMP Dovegate was generally safe and relationships were good, its therapeutic work was seriously undermined because it held too many prisoners who had dropped out of therapy, compounded by staffing and contractual issues, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the unit in the privately-managed category B training prison in Staffordshire.

The 200-bed therapeutic community at Dovegate is one of a small number of such units working with difficult individuals who are serious offenders. At the last inspection, inspectors raised concerns that population pressures and financial incentives to fill beds had led to the therapeutic community filling up with prisoners who had dropped out of therapy. This trend had continued, and around 40% of prisoners were out of therapy. This undermined treatment. Two of the four communities had failed to meet the standards required by the independent accreditation panel.

Inspectors said that urgent remedial action was needed. They also found:

- The therapeutic community was still a generally safe place. Levels of self-harm were low, though there had been one self-inflicted death and there was evidence of an increase in the availability of drugs.
- There were positive relationships between staff and prisoners, particularly for those still in treatment. Living units were of good quality and healthcare was satisfactory.
- Those in therapy spent plenty of time out of cell, unlike those who had dropped out or completed therapy. Similarly, the range of purposeful activities was sufficient only for those in therapy. More vocational training was needed.
- Resettlement strategy and services were underdeveloped, with a backlog in assessments, delays in parole reports and insufficient attention to the needs of lifers. Little was done to help therapy graduates sustain their learning when they moved on to other prisons.

Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons said:

“The Inspectorate has been supportive of the small number of therapeutic communities in the prison system because they make an important contribution to managing serious and challenging prisoners. However, they are difficult to establish and sustain and require sufficient investment and senior management support.

“In particular, as not all prisoners can cope with the intensive therapy involved, drop-outs need to be moved expeditiously to more suitable prisons. Despite previous criticisms, this had not been done. Those out of therapy now made up 40% of the population and many were disaffected and disruptive.

“Population pressures, and a contract focused on filling beds rather than treatment integrity, compounded the problem, but with treatment standards having fallen along with staff morale, urgent action is now required by Serco and the National Offender Management Service to salvage what was previously an innovative unit.”

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the National Offender Management Service, said:

“I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognises the safe and positive environment that Dovegate Therapeutic Community continues to provide and the good work done with prisoners to reduce their risk to the public.

“Therapeutic Communities are a valuable resource, giving prisoners the opportunity to challenge their own behaviour through therapy and group work. Since the report, an operational reorganisation has led to the number of prisoners out of therapy being dramatically reduced. Only 8.5% of prisoners are now out of therapy, and the prison aim to have 100% engagement by Spring.”

Notes for Editors

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 9 December 2008 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>.
2. The announced inspection of HMP Dovegate TC was carried out from 16-20 June 2008.
3. The operational capacity at HMP Dovegate TC at the time of the inspection was 194.
4. The last inspection of HMP Dovegate TC took place from 8-12 March 2004.
5. HMP Dovegate is a category B prison run by Serco that contains a 200-bed TC. The TC was designed as a largely autonomous unit and, as a result, was inspected separately from the main prison.
6. Nigel Newcomen, Deputy Chief Inspector, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to him please contact Nicole Valentinuzzi in the Press Office on 0203 334 3547.