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020 3334 3530

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### **DOVER IRC – SOME DETERIORATION**

Dover Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) had deteriorated in a number of areas and had become more like a prison, said Dame Anne Owers, Chief inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced short follow-up inspection of the centre in Kent.

Dover is one of the three IRCs run by the Prison Service. It has previously had good inspection reports. This inspection, however, revealed some concerns about both the centre's approach and the outcomes for detainees.

Inspectors found:

- Most detainees felt safe, but anti-bullying procedures were poorly understood and implemented. Suicide and self-harm procedures were in general well managed.
- Use of force and separation had increased significantly and this needed to be monitored and carefully managed.
- There had been some improvements in immigration casework, but monthly reviews continued to be largely uninformative and some detainees spent longer than necessary in detention. Some independent legal advice was now available, although not all detainees knew about it.
- Detainees who claimed to be children but whose ages were disputed were held in segregation, in what amounted to solitary confinement, to keep them away from adults. These were wholly unacceptable conditions in which to detain children.
- Relationships with staff were reasonably good and diversity was in general well managed. It was of concern that mental health needs were still not provided for, though they had been mapped.
- There was more activity than in most IRCs. Paid work had increased slightly, and detainees were positive about PE and education.
- There were many complaints about the quality of food.
- Unit staff were now supposed to deal with welfare issues, instead of the dedicated welfare team. This was not effective or consistent and in practice the volunteers in the Dover Detainee Visitors' Group dealt with many welfare issues.

- The visits room remained an austere environment. Detainees were able to contact family and friends by mobile telephone, but still lacked access to the internet or email.

Anne Owers said:

“Like many IRCs, Dover is dealing with a more challenging and varied population, including a high proportion of ex-prisoners. It was nevertheless disappointing that there had been slippage in a number of areas and that the regime and approach was tending to revert to that of a prison, rather than an IRC.

“We had some concerns about the robustness of the procedures to support safety and there had been a significant deterioration in welfare support for detainees about to leave the centre. These are matters that managers need to address if the centre is to retain its positive ethos and ensure a safe environment.”

### **Notes for Editors**

1. A copy of the full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 7 July 2009 at <http://inspectrates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>
2. The short unannounced follow-up unannounced inspection of Dover was carried out from 19 – 21 January 2009. The last full inspection took place in March 2007.
3. The operational capacity of Dover IRC is 316.
4. Dover became a prison in 1952 when the Prison Service took it over from the army. In 1957, it became a borstal and continued to hold young offenders until 2002. From 29 April 2002, Dover was redesignated as an immigration removal centre operating under the 2001 detention centre rules.
5. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact the Press Office on 0203 334 3530.