

FOREST BANK - VERY GOOD LOCAL PRISON, BUT NEEDS MORE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Forest Bank was a very good local prison with extremely positive relationships between staff and prisoners and regular association and exercise, but insufficient purposeful activity, said Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing an inspection report today.

Anne Owers, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons said:

"Forest Bank was a very good local prison. The relationships between staff and prisoners were extremely positive and we found many examples of staff dealing sensitively and appropriately with difficult prisoners. We were concerned about the low staff-prisoner ratios on the main wings, but we could find no examples of collusive or unsafe behaviour as a consequence.

"In view of these levels, and the relative inexperience of staff, we do however commend the Director's recent decision to strengthen the management structure and increase staffing levels on the young prisoners' wing. The prison should continually review its staffing profiles, to ensure that staff have the time to engage proactively with prisoners, and build on the positive relationships that exist."

The Inspectorate also found that association and exercise were regular and prioritised so that, unlike in many local prisons, prisoners had daily access to showers and telephones; and there was a welcome emphasis on cleanliness in cells and communal areas.

However, a major weakness was that there was insufficient purposeful activity, with fewer than half the prisoners engaged in meaningful work or education. The Inspectorate was also concerned that the general atmosphere of respect did not extend to the visits room, where prisoners and their visitors were separated by dividers and there was excessive use of closed visits.

Concluding, Anne Owers said:

"Overall, Forest Bank was a prison that had avoided many of the pitfalls of newly-opened private sector prisons with inexperienced staff and was succeeding in spite of the pressures of significant population increase. It was also a prison with a skilled Director and senior managers and staff who were involved and valued: from junior wing officers to the extremely impressive chaplaincy team, which was seen as an important resettlement and counselling resource.

"The new Director has a great deal to build on. We would urge him to develop the prison's education and training provision, and its resettlement strategy, as matters of priority."

Director General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, said:

"Forest Bank, like other local prisons, faces the challenges of a large and transient population. This inevitably means that purposeful activity in this type of prison is lower than in other prisons as a whole. However, Forest Bank provides a comparable level of purposeful activity to other core locals.

"I am however pleased that the Chief Inspector recognises the healthy relationships between staff and prisoners at Forest Bank. This could not have been achieved without the hard work and enthusiasm of staff at the prison."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The full announced inspection of HMP and YOI Forest Bank was carried out between 17 and 21 June 2002. This was the first inspection of Forest Bank since it opened two and a half years ago.
2. It is a privately run local prison, serving courts in the Greater Manchester area and holding a population of men and young adults which had rapidly expanded from 700 to nearly 1040 at the time of the inspection.
3. HM Prison Inspectorate reports and releases are available at www.homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris