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HMP HIGHPOINT: NOT AN EFFECTIVE TRAINING PRISON

HMP Highpoint was struggling under the pressure of more prisoners, far from home, and was not an effective training prison, said the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, publishing the report of an announced inspection into the Suffolk prison.

The prison had expanded by a third since the last inspection without a similar expansion in activity spaces. This was exacerbated by staffing problems. Fewer than 7% of prisoners lived within 50 miles, and many urban prisoners, particularly from racial and religious minorities, found that their needs were not understood or met.

Inspectors found that most prisoners at Highpoint had not felt unsafe, and levels of self-harm were low. However, other areas caused concern:

- At any one time, 40% of prisoners had nothing to do and over half remained on the wings;
- The standard of the education and training available was satisfactory, but there was very little skills training: too much of the work was unskilled and repetitive, designed to provide income for the prison rather than training for its prisoners;
- Staff-prisoner relationships in general, while relatively relaxed, were reactive rather than supportive;
- Black and minority ethnic prisoners, nearly half of the population, found the almost exclusively white prison staff were culturally unaware, and sometimes racist. Responses were even worse for Muslim prisoners, who made up 20% of the population;
- There was no effective policy, and no recent use of interpretation facilities, for the 184 foreign nationals;
- There was a serious problem with drugs, which the extensive perimeter fence made it difficult to control. Forty percent of prisoners said it was easy to get hold of drugs. One consequence was a high level of prisoner on prisoner assaults, though the prison was taking action on this;
- Resettlement work needed considerable development, and did not yet meet the needs of prisoners. There were significant delays in sentence planning.

Anne Owers said:

“At the time of the inspection, Highpoint was not an effective training prison. The location, the lack of sufficient purposeful activity, the availability of drugs, and the absence of a coherent resettlement strategy all contributed to undermining its core role.

“Moreover, it was not meeting the specific needs of its racially and religiously diverse population. Levels of dissatisfaction and frustration among both staff and prisoners were very high, with potentially serious consequences for good order and security within the prison.

“Many of the prison’s problems stem from the endemic and corrosive effects of population pressure – but tackling them will require both strong management and the active engagement of all the prison’s staff.”

Director General of the Prison Service, Phil Wheatley, said:

“The Chief Inspector accurately describes the very challenging operational problems facing the Governor and her staff. They are working with specialist HQ staff to promote the race equality agenda at the prison. Plans are also well in advance to increase the amount of accredited activity available to prisoners.

“Operational effort is being targeted on the crucial area of reducing illegal drug supply”

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into HMP Highpoint is available from <http://www.inspectorates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>
2. The announced inspection took place **14-18 May 2007**
3. HMP Highpoint has an operational capacity of 816
4. Anne Owers has limited time available for interviews. To request an interview with Anne Owers, please call 020 7210 1473.