

HMP BROCKHILL - NEEDS OF WOMEN IN WEST MIDLANDS NOT MET

HMP Brockhill, a women's local prison, has serious deficiencies, but the solution is not simply to change its role to a men's prison without providing any suitable alternative for women in the West Midlands, said the Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers in the report of an announced inspection published today.

Inspectors were extremely concerned at a proposal to re-role the prison to hold men instead of women, because of a decline in the number of women prisoners. This would mean that there was no women's local prison in the West Midlands. They noted that:

- Brockhill held some very needy women: there had been two deaths and 390 recorded incidents of self-harm in 2004;
- however, most were close to home: 80% of adult women were within 50 miles; many had family ties and dependent children. Moving them away risked further damaging family ties and resettlement prospects.

The inspection pointed to a number of deficiencies at Brockhill:

- the sanitation at night was grossly inadequate;
- showers, healthcare and accommodation were not up to the expected standards;
- catering arrangements, the complaints systems and legal advice were also patchy and poor;
- there were no first night procedures, induction was weak, and the segregation unit was understaffed and lacked sufficient management oversight.

However the prison did have some positives on which to build:

- A purpose-built detoxification centre to meet the specific needs of women had just been completed at considerable cost;
- staff-prisoner relationships were generally good;
- prisoners had a fair amount of time out of cell;
- education and training were improving, and there was sufficient work for all prisoners;
- resettlement was progressing well, with good drug services

and reintegration work.

Anne Owers said:

"There is no doubt that Brockhill has deficiencies, some of which are serious and require major investment.

"But dispersing needy women even further from their homes, families and the courts would only exacerbate their problems and the problems they pose for society. It would be unacceptable if the prison closed to women without a suitable alternative anywhere in the West Midlands."

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

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognised the improvements being made at Brockhill, especially in education and resettlement. The governor recognises that there is still room for improvement in terms of training opportunities for prisoners, and a learning and skills development plan has been produced to address this."

Martin Narey, Chief Executive of the National Offenders Management Service, said:

"There are no formal plans in place to re-role Brockhill at this time. Any final decision will take into account the population projections for women, the benefits the two new women's prisons - HMP Bronzefield and HMP Peterborough - have brought to the female estate, and our commitment to maintaining prisoner contact with their family."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The unannounced inspection of HMP / YOI Brockhill took place on 18 - 22 October 2004.
2. HM Prison / Young Offenders Institute Brockhill is a local prison housing adult and young adult women prisoners.
3. HM Prisons Inspectorate reports and releases are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/insp/prisons>.
4. For an electronic copy of the report, please call 020 7 035

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