

Bullwood Hall provides a stable environment, with good staff-prisoner relationships, for a demanding and volatile population, mainly of young adults and girls, said Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, today, publishing her [report of an announced inspection of the Essex prison](#). However, its underlying staffing and accommodation problems need to be tackled.

Anne Owers said:

"Over half the prisoners we surveyed said that they felt depressed or suicidal on arrival at Bullwood Hall; there was an average of 56 incidents of self-harm and 20 suicide attempts a month, often from a small number of prisoners. The prison had adopted some innovative strategies to support vulnerable prisoners; most of our concerns about safety related to the physical environment, not the level of care.

"The lack of integral sanitation meant that women had to be unlocked at night, one by one, to use toilets. In practice, due to delays, some were reduced to using 'potties' or having to clear up their contents thrown out of windows. There were also implications for safety, as staff could not be present on wings at night while women were out. Juveniles were unsupervised at night, and checks on other vulnerable prisoners were necessarily restricted.

"Bullwood Hall holds the second highest number of girls in the prison estate: 20 at the time of the inspection; and had achieved considerable improvements in education, training and support for them. Some were very vulnerable, three were on suicide watch, and six were pregnant (with child protection implications for the baby as well as the mother). In spite of this, child protection arrangements were inadequate, with poor support from Essex Area Child Protection Committee.

"This is the second occasion recently in which we have made this criticism of ACPCs in relation to girls held in prison. It needs urgent attention at senior level."

The report notes that the prison was active, with good facilities and employment and education for all prisoners. However, apart from juveniles, where the prison was seeking to meet Youth Justice Board

specification, the education and employment on offer were low-level, unskilled and did not meet prisoners' needs.

Good links were being developed with the local Primary Care Trust and mental health in-reach work was being developed. However, the management of healthcare needed urgent improvement, and better links with drugs and mental health work.

Anne Owers concluded:

"Bullwood Hall has the capacity to be a very good women's prison, with enthusiastic staff and managers, sufficient activity and good facilities. However, its staffing difficulties need urgently to be overcome and some of its systems and ways of working need updating and re-energising. At the time of the inspection, it was due to receive remand prisoners. We do not consider that at present it is safe to do so without better detoxification, first night and induction procedures.

"Above all, it needs accommodation that is decent and safe. It is simply unacceptable for women and girls, some of them pregnant, to be slopping out, in what is listed as one of the Prison Service's highest-performing prisons. At the last inspection, we recommended that in-cell sanitation should be installed at Bullwood Hall. This should now be done as a matter of urgency."

Prison Service Director General Phil Wheatley said:

"I am pleased the Chief Inspector recognises that Bullwood Hall, one of our high performing prisons, is safe and decent, despite the staffing and accommodation difficulties.

"These are currently being addressed by a recruitment campaign in the east of England, meaning successful candidates will be in post by June this year. Access to toilets during the night is provided by a fully functioning electronic unlocking system. One of a number of such systems across the estate.

"I know that the prison is pro-active in managing prisoners requiring detox and will be reviewing its Drug Strategy targets and action plans in light of this report. Once this is done I am confident Bullwood Hall will continue to deserve its status as a High

Performing Prison."

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The inspection was held between 8 and 12 December 2003. The last full inspection was between 19 and 23 May 1997 and the last short unannounced inspection was May 1999.

2. Inspectorate reports and releases are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprison>