

HMP Eastwood Park has improved since its last inspection but still faces major challenges in dealing with a growing female prison population including an increasing number of seriously damaged women and girls, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers said today.

Publishing the report of a full announced inspection of the local and remand prison and young offender institution near Bristol, Anne Owers praised staff struggling to cope with an increasingly short-term population, many of them with substance use and mental health problems.

Anne Owers said:

"At our last inspection, we expressed serious concern about the conditions and treatment of the women and girls held at Eastwood Park, in spite of some conscientious work by dedicated staff. The scale of the task facing staff and managers should not be underestimated and it is a tribute to them that this inspection found an improved establishment, which was able to provide a relatively safe and respectful environment.

"In some areas, the challenges were almost overwhelming. For example, though healthcare had improved, the in-patient healthcare centre had in effect become an acute psychiatric ward, in response to the severe mental health needs of some prisoners. It is bad enough that the prison had to manage such damaged individuals, who should have been placed elsewhere; it is unacceptable that, as a consequence, there were no in-patient facilities for the seriously physically ill.

"We remain particularly concerned at the small but increased number of girls and young adults held at Eastwood Park, in spite of previous assurances that under-18s would no longer be held in Prison Service custody."

The report notes that every day Eastwood Park received a large number of prisoners with histories of drug abuse, mental illness and serious self-harm - or all three. Nevertheless, 71% of women said they felt safe at Eastwood Park, compared to 49% in women's local prisons generally. The establishment had strengthened its procedures for managing early days in custody, and for dealing with anti-bullying and self-harm.

But the report says the sheer number of those on suicide and self-harm watch placed a great strain on the mechanisms for effective monitoring and intervention. The report recommends a dedicated care and separation unit would assist in managing and supporting the most needy and disturbed women.

Concerns were again raised at the number of girls and young adults held at Eastwood Park. Girls in particular had insufficient education and training provision, and the report expresses considerable concern about the child protection and support arrangements available for a population which included some extremely damaged children. The Inspectorate considered three of the fifteen held at the time of the inspection were so inappropriately placed that, in spite of the care of the staff, they might have been considered at risk of significant harm under the Children Act. There was insufficient liaison with the Area Child Protection Committee and staff were not all trained in appropriate childcare, or subject to enhanced criminal records checks.

Anne Owers commented:

"If Eastwood Park is to continue to hold children, the establishment must be in closer liaison with the Area Child Protection Committee to ensure that cases of concern are passed to the area child protection co-ordinator for advice and support. However, there is a more fundamental point. The Youth Justice Board and Prison Service need to decide whether Eastwood Park is to continue to hold juveniles, and if so to resource it properly to do so."

The report highlights two matters at Eastwood Park that raise wider issues, the first being resettlement. Local Criminal Justice Boards in the 42 criminal justice areas are seen as key to a joined-up approach to criminal justice, and resettlement is one of the principal areas in which such an approach is necessary. But this is made much more difficult at Eastwood Park by the fact that only 6.5% of its prisoners came from the criminal justice area and were within the remit of the Local Criminal Justice Board.

Nevertheless the report found that the prison itself needed to develop a better and more coherent resettlement policy, based upon the needs of its short-term, transient population. Such a population also requires a properly implemented and updated drugs strategy, given the scale of substance abuse needs.

Anne Owers also commented on the fact that, since the inspection was carried out, the Prison Service had announced that the women's estate is to be disbanded and women's prisons managed through the prison service's 13 geographical areas.

Anne Owers said:

"It is hoped that this will assist women's prisons to plug into local resettlement, drug, and psychology services. Eastwood Park, however, shows the specific problems faced by women's prisons: the distance from home, the acute mental health and substance use problems, and the prevalence of self-harm. There is a clear danger that these specific needs will be lost when women's prisons are absorbed into an area in which they will be a small minority.

"As this Inspectorate has long argued, it is crucial that the specific needs of women continue to be reflected not only in policy development but in operational practice, and this may well require different standards and targets. We will continue to have a dedicated women's inspection team, and will be carefully monitoring any sign that women's issues have been marginalised or disregarded."

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

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognises the progress Eastwood Park has made since its last inspection, however I understand her concerns about the juvenile offenders held there.

"The reality is however that the Prison Service holds all those prisoners sent to us. Provision of places for juvenile offenders is a matter for the Youth Justice Board and the courts. Eastwood Park will learn from this inspection report to improve the treatment of the juveniles in their care.

"I am immensely proud of the achievements made by the governor, Tim Beeston, and his staff in taking Eastwood Park forward and continuing to hold this particularly challenging group of prisoners safely, whilst treating them with dignity and respect. This report is a credit to them all."

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. The full announced inspection of HM Prison Eastwood Park was

carried out between 22-26 September 2003. The last full announced inspection of the prison was carried out in February 2000. The last short unannounced inspection was carried out in October 2001.

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