

Although generally a safe place, North Sea Camp was failing to meet the challenge now facing open prisons, and struggling to cope with a changing population, Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons said today, publishing her report of an announced inspection of the prison. The report identifies significant deficits:

It lacked sufficiently strong systems to reduce risk - for example on reception and first night - and to confront inappropriate behaviour - for example bullying and substance abuse. The quality of some adjudications was poor.

Though relations between staff and prisoners were generally good, inspectors found that a few staff, including senior managers, behaved in an outdated, disrespectful and dismissive way towards prisoners, both verbally and in writing.

There was little purposeful activity, even though the principal aim of the establishment is to prepare prisoners for release. There was inadequate meaningful work, a lack of accredited training and limited education provision.

Although a minority of prisoners had been found work in the local community, the inspection found worrying evidence of exploitative and inappropriate practices, with some prisoners working in local businesses for rates of pay well below the legal minimum wage.

Resettlement services, such as drug treatment and offending behaviour programmes, were also underdeveloped. The personal officer scheme was not working successfully and there was no systematic identification of prisoners' resettlement needs.

Anne Owers said:

"Overall, this inspection found that North Sea Camp is in need of a fundamental and careful reappraisal of its purpose and direction. This reappraisal should be informed by a thorough needs analysis of the changing population, leading to an effective resettlement policy which is fully communicated to staff and the local community.

"Open prisons have an important role to play in the successful reintegration of prisoners, particularly those serving long or life sentences. In our current overcrowded prison system, with a much

more varied mix of prisoners, this is a much more demanding task. North Sea Camp has some way to travel to meet this challenge."

Michael Spurr, Director of Operations of the Prison Service said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has acknowledged that North Sea Camp is a safe prison and that relationships between staff and prisoners are good.

"Population throughput has placed additional pressure on Open prisons, but the weaknesses identified by the Inspection Team are being actively addressed. The Area Manager has instigated a full Strategic review of the establishment which will drive the future direction of the prison. Key recommendations such as improved first night support, increased drug testing and a review of the Resettlement Strategy have already been met."

Notes to Editors:

- HMP North Sea Camp is an open category D prison.
- The announced inspection took place on 19-23 April 2004.
- Inspectorate reports and releases are available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/prisons/inspprisons.
- For an electronic copy of the report, please email joanna.millington2@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or call 020 7273 2196.