

HMP WOLDS - WELL-RUN PRISON NEEDS MORE ACTIVITY

HMP Wolds is a fundamentally good prison but needs to be better resourced to provide sufficient work and skills training for its prisoners, according to a report published today from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers.

The report highlights the fact that the change in the prison's role from local prison to training prison had not been supported by the resources or facilities to provide adequate training. Inspectors found that although prisoners were out of their cells for most of the day, two-thirds had little to occupy them. And despite the fact that there were two excellent workshops, they employed fewer than 40 prisoners.

Nevertheless, Wolds performed well against the inspectors' other tests of a healthy prison. In particular:

- 80% of prisoners had never felt unsafe
- levels of self harm were low
- staff-prisoner relations were good
- prisoners had excellent access to phones, showers, library and the gym

However inspectors were concerned about the inadequacy of race relations work. Black and minority ethnic prisoners reported feeling significantly less safe, and to have experienced worse treatment, than white counterparts. There were no black and minority ethnic staff working with prisoners, and the prison's own monitoring systems were neither comprehensive nor effective. Inspectors also found that the food was of extremely poor standard.

The report also highlights the growing distance between private and public sector prisons in terms of resettlement, which was described as a distinct disadvantage, which would become greater. As a private sector prison, Wolds was not part of the active Yorkshire and Humberside area resettlement strategy. And, like other private prisons, it was unable to use the new unified prison and probation offender assessment system (OASys) which will underpin offender management.

In conclusion, Anne Owers said:

" Overall, Wolds is a reasonably well-performing training prison on all but one of our indicators. Three key issues need to be addressed in order for it to perform well across those tests. The first is that managers need to put in place robust race relations procedures capable of delivering and promoting race equality. The second is that the prison must either be resourced to provide sufficient work and skills training for its prisoners, or else revert to a local prison role. Finally, it is pointless to work towards a seamless system of offender management between prisons and probation if the public-private sector split among prisons themselves renders them incapable of developing and using a shared regional strategy and a common assessment tool. "

"In the medium term, NOMS promises to have structures in place to bridge that gap; but in the meantime, outcomes for the prisoners who are passed between the public and private sectors are being compromised."

Trevor Williams, Assistant Director for Contracted Prisons, said:

"I am pleased that the Chief Inspector has recognised that HMP Wolds is a well-run prison and is providing offenders with a safe and suitable environment.

"Providing offenders with meaningful work and training opportunities is a main priority for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), and the prison is looking into extending the number of certified training work places, including construction industry training. The Prison Management team is also planning to introduce a formal foreign national policy.

"The Government remains committed to the use of contracted prisons as a means of raising standards of delivery, increasing capacity and introducing dynamic management practices into the system. It is important that contracted and public sector prisons cooperate in all necessary and productive ways and we will be addressing any obstacles to cooperation as a matter of high priority. "

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The unannounced inspection of HMP Wolds took place between 10-14 January 2005.
2. HMP Wolds is a Category C male prison in East Yorkshire , run by GSL.

3. 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 4381.