

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 00.01 hrs Wednesday 9 July 2008

‘Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre not performing effectively’: Inspectorates

Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre has been criticised in an inspection report published by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI).

Inspectors who visited the facility found the Young Offender Centre (YOC) struggling to deal with managing the needs of a variety of remanded and sentenced young men and juveniles on a site shared with Northern Ireland’s women’s prison.

“We recognise that some progress has been made at the YOC since Inspectors last visited the facility in March 2005, but overall we found Hydebank Wood was not performing effectively,” said Anne Owers, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales and Kit Chivers, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland.

Inspectors who scrutinised the facility found there was insufficient separation of juveniles and young adults when they were being transferred to the YOC in escort vans. They also found that all young people were handcuffed when travelling without individual risk assessments being carried out.

“The reception facility for young people arriving at Hydebank Wood YOC was poor and the initial procedures were brusque, intimidating and particularly inappropriate for juveniles,” said Ms Owers and Mr Chivers.

“A good written induction policy was found to be in place. However, as most staff were unaware of it, it was not being followed,” they said.

Inspectors were pleased to find a relatively low level of incidents of self harm among young people in custody at the YOC, but they were concerned that incidents of bullying were not being robustly challenged.

“We found a number of incidents of apparent bullying which had never been fully investigated. Other than relocation, there was little effective response to challenge bullying behaviour and no

staff training had been carried out in respect of how to address bullying behaviour. The governor of Hydebank Wood is aware of the need to address this issue and we understand this will be done as a matter of urgency,” said the Chief Inspectors.

During the inspection, Inspectors discovered the quality of food was poor and young people were rarely able to exercise outside. Opportunities for work, learning and skills development on the site were limited. While young people allocated an activity spent a reasonable amount of time out of their cells, many others spent most of their day within the confines of their cells.

Inspectors who assessed the facility also found there was no strategic approach to delivering education and training, and that activities were not sufficiently well co-ordinated.

“Education and training places available were under-utilised despite waiting lists existing for most courses. Inspectors also found there was little planning to meet the individual needs of juveniles and that education and training was not effectively linked to resettlement planning,” they said.

Resettlement arrangements at the YOC were found to have suffered with no resettlement team or a recognisable resettlement culture in place at the facility. Cuts in resources had also left staff demoralised.

“The resettlement policy at Hydebank Wood YOC was aspirational and described elements such as personal officers that were not in place. Policies setting out the differing needs of young adults and children were also found not to exist,” stated the Chief Inspectors.

Commenting on the findings, Ms Owers and Mr Chivers said the progress made at Hydebank Wood in the two and a half years since its was last inspected was disappointing.

“There can be few custodial settings with so many competing risks and vulnerabilities in one small site. That is why it should remain the goal of the Northern Ireland Prison Service to house juveniles and women in separate, dedicated establishments so that their particular needs can be addressed.

“In the meantime, it is imperative the governor of Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre receives the necessary support from the Prison Service to address the shortcomings that have been identified in this report,” they concluded.

Notes to editors

- The inspection was carried out from 5-9 November 2007 by representatives of HMIP and CJI. They were supported by colleagues from the Education and Training Inspectorate.
- The inspection report contains 182 recommendations for improvement.
- Hydebank Wood is a young offender centre that accommodates male young offenders aged 18-21 and male juvenile offenders.
- It has an operational capacity of 201 people who are accommodated in four separate residential units.
- The facility opened in 1979.

For further information or to obtain an interview with Kit Chivers, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland, please contact Meloney McVeigh, Media and Communications Officer on 028 90 258013 or 07966681324.