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HMP LEWES: POOR ENVIRONMENT BUT GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

HMP Lewes suffered from a poor environment, with insufficient activity, but remained decent and safe because of the positive approach of staff and managers, said Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, releasing the report of an announced inspection of the local prison in Sussex.

Inspectors found:

- Relationships between staff and prisoners were the prison's greatest strength. There was evidence that staff knew about and engaged with the prisoners in their care.
- Cells in one wing were barely fit for habitation and needed urgent refurbishment. Prisoners had to sit on the toilet to eat their meals.
- There were some weaknesses in anti-bullying and suicide prevention, but vulnerable prisoners in general felt safe and the care and separation unit was managing some very difficult and demanding prisoners.
- Health services were improving but there were gaps and deficiencies in inpatient care and in primary mental health services
- Good contacts with voluntary and community groups with drug and alcohol work well integrated within the prison and with teams in the community.
- The limited number of activity places were not filled, and learning and skills provision was inadequate – however, prisoners had reasonable amounts of time out of cell
- Despite good links with voluntary and community groups, resettlement work lacked strategic direction. Sentence and custody planning were weak, and around a quarter of prisoners were discharged without accommodation.

Anne Owers said:

“Overall, Lewes was a decent and safe prison, in spite of its physical limitations. That owed a great deal to the positive approach of staff and managers. However, aspects of its work, in resettlement and activities, needed more robust management and direction in order to maximise opportunities and capitalise on the prison's local links. That is far from easy, in an overcrowded and pressurised prison system.”

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

“I join the Chief Inspector in praising the work of staff and managers at Lewes, and their commitment to creating positive relationships between staff

and prisoners. Good relationships are essential in maintaining safety in the prison environment, and contribute to the successful engagement of prisoners in resettlement work.

“A new wing to be opened in the Spring will offer improved accommodation, and other planned refurbishment over the next twelve months will make a significant difference to the physical environment of the prison.”

Notes to Editors

1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into HMP Lewes is available from http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspect_reports/hmp-yoi-inspections.html
2. The announced inspection took place between 20 – 24 August 2007.
3. To request an interview, please call 0207 210 1473.