

LOW NEWTON – COMMENDABLE TREATMENT OF WOMEN PRISONERS

The report of a full announced inspection of HM Prison and Young Offenders Institute Low Newton in Durham is published today by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.

The report describes the positive regime and safe environment within the prison, and gives many illustrations of the proper treatment of women prisoners. It attributes this to 'dedicated, informed and consistent management' within the prison, with support from Prison Service Headquarters. It stresses the importance of maintaining and developing this management style and culture under a new Governor.

Inspectors were particularly impressed with the many examples they observed of women prisoners being treated with dignity and respect by staff as they carried out their duties. The example that senior managers set in their own interactions with women was a very important factor in this.

Anne Owers, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons said:

“Low Newton has embraced many of the key elements that help to foster a healthy prison environment and it should take credit for doing so with a very difficult and damaged population. The establishment had begun to acknowledge the very different needs of women in prison and should be further supported centrally by national policies.”

The report highlights a number of areas of good practice at Low Newton:

- The excellent health service was a model of good practice for female local prisons;
- Good preliminary work was being done to offer help to some of the women who had suffered physical and sexual abuse;
- The establishment was well cared for with careful attention given to such things as pictures and flowers, all of which helped to create an environment of care;
- The induction programme was well organised, purposeful and described by some women prisoners as the best they had ever received.

The report identifies areas in which improvements could be made:

- The drugs strategy as a whole needed to be revised to address the complex needs of women offenders, both before and after discharge;
- An appropriate management structure and strategy for the care of young women prisoners at Low Newton should be developed urgently;

- The Personal Officer scheme should be strengthened.

Concluding, Anne Owers said:

“When we return unannounced within the next two years we will be keen to observe whether the enormous progress in the proper treatment of women prisoners at Low Newton recorded in this report has been sustained and further developed.”

Commenting on the report, Martin Narey, Director General of the Prison Service said:

“This is an excellent report. David Thompson and his staff must be congratulated for the many examples of good practice found at the prison and for the caring and humane way in which women are treated.

“Prison Service staff working with women prisoners are dealing with a difficult and vulnerable population and drugs issues figure prominently in the work carried out in prisons such as Low Newton. A drugs strategy specifically for this area is being developed.

“A strategy to manage the young offenders is also being developed, and I am certain that, in addition to provisions that have already been put in place, we can improve the regime for this vulnerable age group.”

NOTE FOR EDITORS

1. The full announced inspection of HMP and YOI Low Newton was carried out from 30 July to 3 August 2001.
2. HMP and YOI Low Newton is a closed female prison and Young Offender Institution holding both unconvicted and convicted adult and young women prisoners.
3. Prison Inspectorate reports and press releases are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris.htm>