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HMP & YOI NEW HALL – IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

HMP & YOI New Hall is reasonably safe, but more needs to be done to improve relationships between prisoners and staff and to expand reintegration services, said Dame Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection into the West Yorkshire women's prison.

New Hall holds a needy and challenging population of sentenced and unsentenced women, young adults and girls, as well as a mother and baby unit. It has now been clustered with Askham Grange women's open prison.

Inspectors found

- A significant number of women arriving at New Hall had serious substance abuse, mental health and self-harm issues. There were weaknesses in reception, first night, anti-bullying and suicide prevention arrangements.
- Staff-prisoner relations were generally poor, not helped by a disproportionate number of male staff for a women's prison. Some staff had outdated and inappropriate attitudes to women, especially those with mental health issues.
- Much of the dormitory accommodation remained cramped, cold and unfit for purpose. Women had inadequate access to showers. Support for the significant number of foreign national women was underdeveloped.
- The amount of time women spent out of cell was reasonable, but evening association was too often cancelled. The quality and quantity of education, work and skills was satisfactory.
- There were some sound resettlement and integration services, but they were insufficient to meet demand, particularly in areas such as housing, finance and work to address offending behaviour. A particularly well-regarded resettlement project, Together Women, was under threat.
- There was insufficient support for the very high number of women reporting alcohol-related problems.

Anne Owers said:

“Managers of multi-functional women's prisons such as New Hall have to deal with a wide array of risks and needs among a diverse and complex population.

“Commendably, the prison had risen to some of these challenges. It provided a generally safe environment, with a reasonable amount of purposeful activity

and an increased focus on resettlement. However, there remained much still to do, including expanding reintegration services and – in particular – improving the poor attitudes of some staff towards the women in their care.

“The task facing New Hall is huge and it is therefore of considerable concern that, not long after this inspection, it was announced that it was to amalgamate with Askham Grange prison near York. The wisdom of making New Hall’s already difficult task more challenging by adding responsibility for this distant satellite must be open to question.”

Phil Wheatley, Director General of the National Offender Management Service, said:

“The Chief Inspector has accurately described the considerable task facing New Hall, but I am sure that the Governor and staff are up to the challenge and committed to driving forward change. I am confident that they will build on their success in creating a safe environment with a focus on resettlement and purposeful activity.

“Clustering New Hall with Askham Grange, a high performing prison, will improve links between the closed and open prison. It will make the best use of available resources to address prisoners’ offending behaviour and keep the public safe.”

Notes for Editors

1. The full report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 28 May 2009 at <http://inspectors.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons>.
2. The announced inspection of HMP & YOI New Hall took place from 10 – 14 November 2008.
3. The operational capacity at HMP & YOI New Hall at the time of the inspection was 447.
4. The last announced full inspection of HMP & YOI New Hall took place in November 2004.
5. HMP & YOI New Hall is a local training prison for adult women, young adult women and juvenile girls.
6. Anne Owers, Chief Inspector, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Tom Hodson in the Press Office on 0203 334 3527.