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OAKINGTON IMMIGRATION RECEPTION CENTRE: LOSS OF DIRECTION AND PURPOSE LEADING TO DETERIORATION

Oakington Immigration Reception Centre (IRC) had lost direction and purpose, and was not performing sufficiently well in key areas, particularly safety and respect, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the immigration reception centre in Cambridgeshire.

Inspectors found:

- Half the detainees said that they had felt unsafe. This was partly due to immigration uncertainty, and the lack of information from inexperienced immigration staff, and partly because of poorly supervised dormitory accommodation.
- Use of force had increased and was inadequately monitored. The use of the detainee departure unit continued to cause concern.
- Security had improved and the number of escapes had reduced.
- Staff-detainees relationships had deteriorated significantly. Only 60% of detainees, compared to 89% at the last inspection, said that most staff treated them with respect. In general, staff were distant, reactive and unaware of detainees' personal circumstances. Neither staff nor managers realised that they had been holding one detainee for nearly two years.
- The accommodation lacked necessary investment and was tired and often uncomfortable.
- Although activities provision for short-stay detainees had improved, and there were plans to develop this further, there was little for longer-staying men to do, and only 6% of the population could engage in paid work. There was, however, good access to the grounds.
- Essential welfare advice depended on extra-contractual work by the Refugee Council, whose contract was ending, and voluntary help organised through the chaplaincy. There were no realistic plans to provide an effective and supportive service.

Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, said:

“This was a disappointing inspection of an establishment which seemed to have lost direction and purpose. The uncertainty about the centre’s future was undoubtedly a factor in this, making planning difficult and inhibiting necessary investment in the infrastructure.

“However, this appeared to have infected managers and staff with a short-term, reactive approach. It is important for the UK Border Agency to clarify the future of the centre as soon as possible – and also to resource and staff it properly for as long as it continues to exist.

“Whatever these difficulties, it is equally important that managers and staff focus on running a safe, supportive and purposeful environment for the detainees in their care.”

Notes to Editors

1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into Oakington Immigration Reception Centre is available from <http://inspectrates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>
2. The announced inspection took place between 16-20 June 2008
3. Anne Owers is available for interview. To request an interview with her, please call Andrew Winstone in the Press Office on 020 3334 3530

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