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### **OLDER PRISONERS IN ENGLAND AND WALES: NATIONAL OFFENDER MANAGEMENT SERVICE FAILING TO MEET NEEDS**

The National Offender Management Service still has no national strategy for older prisoners, and their needs are too often not met, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing a follow-up report to the Inspectorate's 2004 thematic review of older prisoners in England and Wales.

Men over 60 account for around 3% of the prison population, and 7% of women in prison are over 50. Prisoners have earlier onset of chronic health and social care needs than the general population.

The report commends work done by voluntary sector organisations, such as Age Concern, NACRO and the Prison Reform Trust, and the work of two regional care service improvement partnerships (CSIPs) in the South West and West Midlands. It also points to progress in prison healthcare and to some extremely good work being carried out in individual prisons. However, this good practice was not being spread sufficiently.

The report, however, describes the response of the National Offender Management Service to the needs of older prisoners as 'disappointing', pointing out there are still no mandatory national and local standards, and that there is a significant dislocation between the provision for older prisoners, particularly their resettlement needs, and the government's national strategy for an ageing population. Eight of the key recommendations from the 2004 thematic had not been implemented. There is still too much reliance on individual committed officers and healthcare.

The thematic review examined 29 prisons inspected in 2006-7. Findings included

- Only in two prisons were the needs of older prisoners identified on reception
- On residential units there was a lack of adaptation for those with impairment or disability and there were numerous examples where residential staff were unaware of which prisoners would need help in an emergency
- Only 3 prisons had a policy for older prisoners; where there was a focus on older prisoners, this fell to an often overworked disability officer

- Survey responses did show improvement in several areas since 2003-4, with higher levels of safety and better relationships with staff; though older prisoners were more likely to be victimised by other prisoners because of disability.
- Despite some physical activities for older prisoners, there was too little appropriate activity, with long periods of time spent locked in cells.
- There was some provision for older prisoners in healthcare, but little evidence of multi-disciplinary working with other staff. Not all prisons had a named lead nurse for older people
- There was no training for staff in identifying signs of mental health problems among the elderly
- Resettlement was an area of real concern, with very little specific help for the older population.

Anne Owers said:

“The voluntary and healthcare sectors have done a great deal of important and useful work in this area. It now falls to the National Offender Management Service to make full use of that work, and of the recommendations in our last report, to ensure that prisons properly reflect, and can provide for, the needs of their ageing population.”