

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 HOURS ON TUESDAY 22 JANUARY

**DORCHESTER – A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE**

The report on an unannounced follow-up inspection of HM Prison Dorchester was published today by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.

The report found HMP Dorchester to be a happier place than in October 1999, when it was last inspected, with a positive atmosphere around the establishment and good relationships between prisoners and staff.

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

“In HMP Dorchester's last report, it was described as ‘an impoverished local prison with a very high turnover of prisoners’. Although this remains the case, a much happier atmosphere pervades the establishment. Positive relationships between the Governor and his staff and between staff and prisoners were very much in evidence.”

The Inspectorate commends the ‘excellent bail scheme’, as well as the chaplaincy's proactive approach to promote the prison in the community and encourage involvement from outside groups to support the prisoners, such as public speaking and a chaplaincy website.

The report also praises the low recorded levels of violence within the prison and the professional way in which control and restraint techniques are applied.

The report does, however, draw attention to the failure of both HMP Dorchester and the local community to address the high number of heroin users entering the prison. Current detox programmes are seen as ‘only scratching the surface’ of the problem of substance abuse which affects 40-60% of new entrants to the prison.

The Inspectorate was also concerned about the new health care facility, which does not meet health care standards, despite concerns in the previous report about the design of the facility. It also and Dorchester's lack of commitment to resettlement issues.

The report recommends many more links with the local community, who currently seem to adopt an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ approach to the prison.

Concluding, Anne Owers said:

“Generally speaking, prisoners were pleased to be at Dorchester and particularly so in preference to a number of other establishments in the area. There were, however, issues at Dorchester that caused us serious concern, particularly resettlement and health care provisions.

“Dorchester has an important role to play both in the wider prison estate and within the local community. We hope that this report can be used to assist the establishment in that task. Notwithstanding the many concerns and recommendations in the report, we left Dorchester believing it to be a better place than when we had last visited it.”

The Director General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, said:

“The Chief Inspector’s report rightly congratulates Dorchester’s staff for their positive attitude. They have worked hard to improve the way that the prison contributes to reducing crime in the community. The staff believe that the previous report failed to recognise the very positive relationships between staff and prisoners at Dorchester which compensates in part for the less than ideal living conditions. But their response to that earlier critical report has been entirely positive and I congratulate Richard Bateman and his staff on what has been achieved.”

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

1. The inspection of HM Prison Dorchester was carried out between 25 and 29 June 2001.
2. HM Prison Inspectorate reports and releases are available at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris.htm](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris.htm)