

LEYHILL – NEEDS TO REGAIN FOCUS ON RESETTLEMENT

Six weeks after the Home Secretary called for a more imaginative use of open prisons the Chief Inspector of Prisons releases two inspection reports on Latchmere House and Leyhill, two well-known open and resettlement prisons. Anne Owers says that both need to strengthen and refocus their resettlement work and the Prison Service needs to recognise and support this important part of the prison estate.

HMP Leyhill had “lost direction” over the last few years and needs to refocus on preparing its low risk prisoners for release, said HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers in an inspection report on the prison published today.

The report is based on a full, announced inspection of Leyhill carried out in September 2001. It is released at the same time as an inspection report on the resettlement prison at Latchmere House, which the Inspectorate found was also “drifting”. The Chief Inspector concludes that the role of these low security establishments within the Prison Service needs to be strengthened and clarified.

However the Chief Inspector was impressed by the approach the new Governor was taking and was optimistic about the future of Leyhill.

Anne Owers said:

“Leyhill has been regarded as a flagship open prison. It has many positive aspects: good surroundings and facilities, high profile involvement in the Chelsea Flower Show, generally good relationships between staff and prisoners, and effective risk management.

“However we were disappointed to find that the prison had clearly lost direction. As an open prison, it should be preparing low risk prisoners for release. Yet, as at Latchmere House, we found that key building blocks for effective resettlement were not in place.

“Instead of properly assessing the needs of prisoners and tailoring its provision to those needs, we often felt that the opposite was the case: prisoners’ needs were fitted into what the establishment could, or wanted to, provide. For example education and skills-based training took second place to providing a labour force for the prison’s industries, many of which would not improve employability outside.

”It was, however, very encouraging to find that the new Governor and his team had already identified the deficiencies in Leyhill’s regime. The Governor’s development plan, which we commend, placed resettlement at the heart of the prison’s activities. Moreover the

Governor has received wide support from the staff and almost universal acclaim from prisoners in recognition of his aim to develop Leyhill as a leader in effective resettlement.

“We were confident that our findings and recommendations would feed into a positive process already taking place.”

More generally, the Chief Inspector recommends that the Prison Service undertake a strategic review of its open prisons, to clarify their role within the estate and ensure that they act as a key element in the wider strategy to prevent reoffending.

Anne Owers said:

“Open Prisons are not simply providers of low cost, low security accommodation, but should meet the resettlement needs of all their prisoners. Some will require highly focused work to re-establish, or establish, work and community ties; some will need more general assistance with the process of re-entry and the pressures this will bring.

“In the future I hope that any open prison we inspect would have a clear understanding of its resettlement responsibilities within an area strategy and be able to demonstrate how it is meeting them.”

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

“Leyhill is a very good prison indeed – one I am very proud of. But it is true that it currently has a dual role of preparing long term prisoners for release and also for providing inexpensive accommodation and opportunities for low risk, short term offenders. We should not be ashamed of this role: it is useful, and provides best value for public money.

“I am confident that the combination of our resettlement strategy and Richard Booty’s leadership will enable Leyhill to be the forefront of effective resettlement opportunities for all its prisoners.”

Notes to Editors

1. In a speech to Prison Service Conference, 4 February 2002, the Home Secretary said ‘ we need to categorise prisoners much more effectively so that we can use the open prison stock...with imaginative use of tracking and monitoring what happens to those prisoners.’

2. The full announced inspection of HMP Leyhill took place on 10-14 September 2001.
3. HMP Leyhill is an open category D training prison located in Gloucestershire. At the time of the inspection it accommodated 383 adult male prisoners, including prisoners on life sentences.
4. This Inspection report is being published alongside that on Latchmere House, as the two reports raise similar issues about the role and focus of open establishments within the Prison Service estate.
5. Prison Inspectorate reports and press releases are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris.htm>