

## **SWALESIDE - CONCERNS OVER SAFETY, DECENCY AND REHABILITATION**

A new focus on respect and rehabilitation is needed at HMP Swaleside if it is to be a safe, decent and effective prison, a report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons said today.

The report, of an announced inspection, identifies a number of areas of concern at the category B male training prison in Kent.

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

“This report raises many areas of concern in relation to the safety, decency and rehabilitation of prisoners at Swaleside. We found that these concerns were shared by the new Governor and his senior managers, and hope that this report will assist them in their task of moving the prison on.”

The report found some areas of good practice at Swaleside and highlights two positive elements of the regime in particular. The healthcare centre was found to be impressive, and a credit to its staff and managers, and offending behaviour programmes were also extremely good.

However, the report identifies problems in several key areas. It acknowledges that there were staff shortages and that Swaleside has had a reputation for being a 'hard' prison, where more difficult Category B prisoners were sent because of the higher security available there. But the report says neither of these should be an excuse for inactivity or for the lack of basic standards of decency and respect.

Standards of safety and decency on the main wings fell far short of what is required. There had been over 250 reportable incidents in the last year and the last six months had seen 16 cell fires, 12 assaults on staff and 15 by prisoners on prisoners. A survey of prisoners recorded a 'worryingly high level of allegations of racial abuse' especially from staff on one wing and in the segregation unit; the 'thorough and enthusiastic' Race Relations Liaison Officer needed more time and support.

The report found that, as a training prison, Swaleside had too few appropriate educational and training opportunities, with work that was too often geared to generating income for the prison, rather than helping prisoners acquire skills. A particular problem identified was the failure to produce effective sentence plans or, in many cases, any sentence plans at all. It was estimated that some 250 uncompleted sentence reports were caught in a backlog.

Main recommendations in the report include:

- There should be clear rules for prisoner behaviour that are applied consistently and fairly.
- An environment that is respectful to prisoners should be developed.
- Managers and staff should engage more effectively with prisoners.
- An effective anti-bullying strategy should be implemented.
- Diversity issues should be given much greater importance.
- There should be effective co-ordination of education and training across the prison.
- All determinate sentence prisoners should have good quality sentence plans.

Concluding, Anne Owers said:

“The task facing the new Governor and his managers is a large one. They will need to focus on re-establishing institutional and personal respect between and among staff and prisoners; ensuring the safety of prisoners and their environment; and increasing appropriate activity and training. Those will be the pillars of a training prison that can help to prevent reoffending by providing a purposeful and decent environment.”

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

“Swaleside is a decent prison and the new Governor, Mike Conway, is building upon the good work of the previous Governor.

“Most of the points raised in this report were already in the process of being addressed when the Chief Inspector visited in July. Progress has been made in the intervening months. The number of assaults against staff has decreased by 25 per cent and the number of prisoners testing positive for drugs has more than halved.

“I share the Chief Inspector’s desire to keep prisons free of discrimination. It is important however to put this into context: and evidence of direct or intentional discrimination on grounds of ethnicity will be treated very robustly, almost certainly by dismissal.

“The Governors of Swaleside, Standford Hill and Elmley are determined to ensure that discrimination does not take place in their prisons and that more is done to support diversity. They are recruiting two full time diversity officers who will cover all three prisons and will spearhead the development of the diversity agenda.”

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. The announced inspection of HM Prison Swaleside was carried out between 15th and 19<sup>th</sup> July 2002.
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)