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HMP SWANSEA – A SAFE BUT OVERCROWDED PRISON

HMP Swansea performed reasonably well in the three important areas of safety, respect and resettlement but struggled with too many prisoners, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the findings of a short follow-up inspection of the Welsh local prison.

Recent inspections have shown that good staff-prisoner relationships helped to mitigate some of the problems caused by old and unsuitable buildings and insufficient activity space. This inspection confirmed that relationships in general remained very good.

Inspectors found that:

- Swansea was in general a safe prison, but there was too much reliance on relationships, as opposed to systems, to support this, with the danger that some prisoners less well-known to staff could be overlooked.
- Personal officer work was underdeveloped and cultural and racial awareness was not strong.
- The environment remained clean but overcrowded - single cells with unscreened toilets were shared and there were insufficient showers.
- First night and induction procedures had improved, but there were weaknesses in the oversight of anti-bullying and suicide prevention measures.
- Vulnerable prisoners were now integrated into the prisoner population with access to a full regime. There was still no dedicated detoxification wing, but drug use appeared relatively low for a local prison.
- There had been noticeable improvements in activity, despite the limitations of space. Time out of cell had increased, as had the number of education and training spaces, although there was insufficient basic skills provision.
- There had been little progress in Swansea's resettlement work since the last inspection, although it continued to function reasonably well.

Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons said:

“Overall, it is creditable that Swansea continued to perform reasonably well against three of our tests – safety, respect and resettlement – and that it had improved in relation to the fourth, activity – although not enough to be able to meet the needs of its prisoners.

“Like most inner city Victorian local prisons, Swansea will continue to struggle with too many prisoners, in unsuitable and poorly-equipped buildings.

“However, like many small local prisons, the good relationships between staff and prisoners made it a relatively safe prison and compensated to some extent for the deficiencies of the environment.”

Michael Spurr, Chief Operating Officer for the National Offender Management Service, said:

“I am pleased that the Inspector has highlighted the good staff-prisoner relationships and noted that the establishment is performing well in terms of safety.

“The Governor and staff at Swansea are working to tackle a number of issues that have been raised by the inspectors. A new diversity training package has been developed to improve cultural and race awareness, the prison is working closely with local providers on substance misuse treatment and new sanitation screening is being installed throughout the prison.”

Notes for Editors

1. The announced inspection of HMP Swansea was carried out from 18-21 February 2008.
2. HMP Swansea is a local prison serving the courts in South Wales.
3. The Operational Capacity of HMP Swansea is 422.
4. The last full inspection of HMP Swansea took place on 4-7 April 2005.
5. Anne Owers, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, is available for interview. If you would like to speak to her please contact Tom Hodson in the Press Office on 0203 334 3527.