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NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00:01 09 MAY 2008

THORN CROSS: HIGH-PERFORMING JUVENILE UNIT NOW CLOSED

Thorn Cross juvenile unit has now closed, in spite of being a beacon of good practice, said Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an unannounced follow-up inspection.

Thorn Cross housed the only open juvenile unit. Inspectors found that the unit, which had always provided a safe and positive environment, had improved even further. It was the only male juvenile establishment that was assessed as performing well across all the Inspectorate's four tests: safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement. It had been under-used, but steps were being taken to encourage greater use.

Inspectors found:

- Far fewer young people than in other juvenile establishments had felt unsafe, and there was innovative anti-bullying and support work;
- Young people were able to access education and training opportunities, with support for those with special educational needs;
- Relationships between young people and staff remained good;
- Healthcare was good, with very good sexual health services;
- Resettlement was generally well-run although there were difficulties in placing young people in outside employment.

Anne Owers said:

"This inspection showed that the Thorn Cross juvenile unit was a beacon of good practice in working with a small number of young people and preparing them for the transition to life outside prison. This is a model that should be built on, not abandoned. It may be that this would be better delivered through smaller units in a number of locations – and this is something that the Youth Justice Board is now reviewing.

"However, to close Thorn Cross before there are any concrete plans for alternative open units, and largely for immediate financial reasons, is both disappointing and retrograde."

Phil Wheatley, Chief Executive of National Offender Management Services, said:

"I am grateful for the Chief Inspector's report, of which the Governor and staff can be rightly proud. The unit at Thorn Cross has changed its role and now

houses young adults aged 21 to 25, who are accommodated alongside the existing young offender population. The change means that the excellent services provided by the unit are preparing more young people to lead law-abiding lives when they leave prison.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1. A full copy of the HMCIP report into HMYOI Thorn Cross is available from <http://www.inspectorates.justice.gov.uk/hmiprisons/>**
- 2. The announced inspection took place between 19 - 21 November 2007.**
- 3. HMYOI Thorn Cross has an operational capacity of 321.**
- 4. Anne Owers has limited time available for interviews. To request an interview with Anne Owers, please call 020 7 210 8029**