

REPORT OF REGENERATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Prison Visits	Classification Public	Enclosures
	Ward(s) affected All	

1. FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF THE REGENERATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMISSION: COUNCILLOR MICHAEL DESMOND

- 1.1 In undertaking a series of prison visits, holding seminars with prisoners, examining facilities and talking to senior prison officers, it was not our intention to make unrealistic pronouncements, recommendations or judgments; rather, we were inclined to go directly to perpetrators of crime to establish any obvious correlation between background, level of educational attainment, circumstances, etc. to see if there were things we could learn from, with a view to reducing crime in Hackney.
- 1.2 The visits were an eye-opener; many of us had never been into a prison before and it was helpful to sample the atmosphere and ambiance of the institutions. We were surprised that Pentonville, an old prison, which in its' early days had been considered a blueprint for the future, did not have dining facilities; in some instances prisoners were locked up for 23 hours a day and they usually ate in their cells. The variety of staff, most of whom seemed to go about their duties with a "light touch", led us to agree with the Governor who said "prison should be as punishment, not for punishment", in other words, the deprivation of liberty was the primary purpose and *constituted* the punishment.
- 1.3 At Chelmsford, we were concerned about the confined space young inmates were restricted to and the cramped conditions. Holloway had a more dormitory feel about it, especially for young prisoners and its' drug rehabilitation facilities were undoubtedly of benefit to them; many had not been able to get help for their drug problems on the outside world.
- 1.4 There has been extensive research carried out, primarily in the United States, but also in the UK about causes of crime and recidivism. Our Inquiry has established the need for more after-care and mentoring, for instilling ambition and hope through vocational education and courses but ultimately, we found there were less differences between those inside and the rest of society, than might have been expected.
- 1.5 The needs of victims were of concern to us and we had ample opportunity to discuss these with the prisoners, most of whom were philosophical and prepared to acknowledge their crimes.
- 1.6 The suggestions and conclusions we make at the end of this report have to be set against other competing - and in some instances - conflicting resource-oriented

demands; ultimately the cost to society of an increasing prison population will be reduced if less crime is committed and there is a decrease in custodial sentences.

1.7 One of the biggest concerns to inmates was the need for housing upon release. Whilst it is a matter of conjecture, whether appropriate facilities can be provided when there is so much housing need in general, there is no reason why more advice and assistance cannot be given, especially to young prisoners.

1.8 Whether you live or work in Hackney, it is well-understood that crime and fear of crime is a blight on our community. By speaking to prisoners, examining conditions and writing this report, we hope to contribute to a more rational discussion of the problem, encourage longer-term planning and help address the fundamental issues, rather than skirt around the surface.

2. INTRODUCTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE COMMISSION'S INVESTIGATION

2.1 During 2002 and 2003 members of then Crime & Disorder Panel visited three prisons in the London area to interview inmates and prison officers.

2.2 The terms of reference for the visits were to:

- Identify what prisoners themselves see as the reasons for their offending or re-offending;
- Establish what support is offered when released from prison;
- Investigate what effect prison conditions have on an inmates' rehabilitation; and
- Draw conclusions accordingly.

2.3 Members of the Panel visited the following institutions:

- HMP Pentonville on 4 December 2002

At Pentonville, members of the Panel were given the opportunity to speak to five inmates, all of whom had spent some time in Hackney. All of the men were then undertaking an educational programme to help them when released from prison. Some said that they had been in prison before and one had been in the penal system for forty years. All were happy with the way in which they were treated at the prison but would have liked more opportunity to be out of their cells. They were often in their cells for twenty-three hours each day.

- HMP Holloway on 4 April 2003

Background information on Holloway included the following:

- It was originally constructed by the City of London and opened in 1852 as a mixed prison, becoming all female circa 1902. It was completely rebuilt between 1971-1985 on the same site;
- Holloway has approximately 450 inmates;
- Most inmates were waiting to go to court or awaiting sentencing;
- Up to 75% of inmates used the prison detoxification programme;
- Inmates with particular treatment needs are identified for the detoxification

programme on reception by prisoners volunteering for the Cranstoun project (and being vetted by the Cranstoun team).

- 10% were asylum seekers;
- At the time of the visit there was a shortfall of 40 staff and efforts were being made to recruit staff to take Holloway up to full capacity which is 220 staff. Lack of staff meant that facilities had to be closed which is frustrating for inmates and staff alike;
- Holloway took in young offenders from the age of 15; efforts were made to segregate young offenders from older prisoners.

The Panel were informed that all prisons have drugs problems and at present there is a growing problem where inmates needed psychological care caused by drugs problems. Currently there are not enough resources or staff to deal with the amount of support needed.

The following facilities are available at Holloway:

- An education centre with full-time, part-time and evening classes, workshops, training courses, a works department, and farms and gardens.
- Modern gym and body shop
- Swimming pool
- Pottery/ceramic classes
- Exercise Grounds which are tendered by inmates
- A mother and baby wing
- Offending behavior groups e.g. reasoning and rehabilitation, anger management, assertion training and dealing with domestic violence.
- Other special features include: Welfare to Work, Job Club, listener schemes, programme development and community projects.

The Panel were given the opportunity to speak to six young women between the ages of 17 to 20 who were waiting to go to court or awaiting sentencing. One of the inmates was from Hackney. It was noted that two of the inmates had had children by the age of 16. The group each gave reasons for being in Holloway which included charges of importing drugs, shoplifting and other theft and the stabbing of a shopkeeper to obtain money for drugs.

- HMP/YOI Chelmsford on 24 July 2003

Background information on Chelmsford included the following:

- Chelmsford is separated into adult and juvenile sections.
- The juvenile section accommodates inmates aged between 18 and 21 years.
- Altogether the institution holds 568 inmates, 158 of which were juvenile offenders.
- Chelmsford houses Category B & C prisoners.

The Panel were given the opportunity to speak to two inmates. Both had been convicted of dealing in drugs or carrying drugs and were keen to get out as soon as possible - one in particular as he had fathered a child that was due to be born soon.

The Panel was also given the opportunity to speak with Andy Clarke, the Acting Governor, to obtain his views on the issues which Chelmsford faced.

3. COMMENTS OF THE FINANCIAL CONTROLLER

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, any initiative flowing from the recommendation should be subject to a full financial assessment before a decision is taken to implement.

4. COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

- 4.1 There are no legal or propriety issues which require comment.

5. EVIDENCE

- 5.1 Members asked inmates and prison officers a series of questions around the terms of reference. Their answers are detailed below.

5.2 *Prisoners' reasons for offending or re-offending*

Members discussed with inmates what they saw as the reasons for their offending and where relevant re-offending. Members found that the three groups of inmates gave similar reasons for resorting to crime.

A lack of employment opportunities contributed to the inmates turning to crime. Many of the inmates commented that they wanted a quick and easy way of making money. They saw people with big cars and lots of jewellery and thought that the only way they could obtain these items was through crime. However, some of the inmates noted that they did not necessarily think someone from a deprived background was more likely to be involved in crime. They noted that people from wealthy backgrounds had more money to buy drugs and were therefore an easier target for drug dealers.

The inmates acknowledged that an unstable home-life, abuse and getting involved in drugs were the predominant factors that led young people to crime.

There was a general feeling amongst the Panel members that while several of the inmates were well educated and all seemed to have ambitions and be articulate, all were negative about their chances of not re-offending.

The inmates said that while they had learnt their lesson being in prison, it was hard to break the cycle especially where drugs were involved. Returning to familiar areas and getting involved with the same lifestyle, groups of friends, combined with an unstable home life meant it was very easy to get involved in criminal activities and drugs and end up back in prison. In addition there was a lack of job opportunities, particularly for people with criminal records, meaning that sometimes it was easier to return to crime.

Further, returning to prison was sometimes the easy option, especially for those involved in drugs. Being in prison gave the inmates an opportunity to get on rehabilitation programmes and get off drugs.

Some inmates said that when released from prison, there was a delay before they could enter drug rehabilitation programmes. During this time they were at their most vulnerable. Getting support immediately upon being released would help prevent re-offending.

When asked what they would say to young people to prevent them from becoming involved in crime, inmates responded by saying that education is very important. It will provide young people with opportunities of getting a good job and earning a good income.

5.3 *Support offered when released from prison*

Members asked inmates at Holloway whether staff were helpful in assisting with the arrangement of Council services upon release. It was felt that there was a lack of support upon leaving prison and the lack of coordination with other services for example housing. In addition there was a lack of basic knowledge amongst staff as to what help and support is available on release.

Mr Andy Clarke, the then Acting Governor at HMP/YOI Chelmsford referred to the problem of insufficient assistance and support for inmates once they were released. Inmates were often not qualified in appropriate trades or professions; Mr Clarke noted that not everyone had the temperament or ability to be computer professionals and referred to the softening of the IT skills market. He referred to the difficulty which the prison service had in allocating convicted offenders to prisons where their family and friends could visit. For example, there are no category A prisons in close proximity to Chelmsford. This often led to the break-up of relationships and families, resulting in the increased isolation of an inmate upon release.

5.4 *Effect of prison conditions on inmate rehabilitation*

In response to a question from members about whether the experience of prison provided a deterrent from future wrongdoing, one of the inmates effectively said that no matter what was done he would still be the same. The majority of his life had been spent in some institution, and nothing could change that.

It was generally agreed by the inmates that conditions in prison were okay but the use of facilities should be available more often. It was also felt that there were not enough visits allowed from family and friends.

At HMP/YOI Chelmsford Mr Clarke spoke of the problem of co-ordinating the availability of prison beds (the responsibility of the actual prison) and the allocation of prisoners (the responsibility of an external government entity). Often staff at Chelmsford wanted an inmate to stay because he had settled and was finishing an effective training programme but he was due to be allocated elsewhere. The 'pushing through' of inmates meant that they were often not finishing training programmes which affected their chances of successfully reintegrating back into the community. Often inmates are released with little or no more training or education than they had when they were convicted.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 From the visits to Pentonville, Holloway and Chelmsford, the Regeneration and Social Inclusion Scrutiny Commission make the following recommendations:

That Hackney Council give consideration to:

- introducing a joint programme to help ex-inmates back into work;
- how more timely support can be provided to prevent newly-released inmates from turning back to drugs;
- whether educational programmes can be run in schools to prevent young people from turning to crime;
- whether a programme of mentoring and counselling can be established for recidivists; and
- the needs of inmates once released, especially in relation to rehabilitation, support and housing.

Lead Councillor: **Cllr Michael Desmond**

Scrutiny Officer: Bianca Garwood ☎ 020 8356 3326

Agreed by the Regeneration and Social Inclusion Scrutiny Commission on 9 March 2005

7 CONTRIBUTORS

Evidence was given by Ray Preston, the Interim Head of Youth Crime Reduction on the Hackney Youth Offending Team and the Youth Crime Prevention Team at the Commission meeting on 24 January 2005.

Members attended the following prisons:

- HMP Pentonville, 4 December 2002;
- HMP Holloway, 4 April 2003; and
- HMP/YOI Chelmsford, 24 July 2003.

All the contributions were of value and the Commission is grateful to all participants. Any omissions or errors are the responsibility of the Commission.

8 MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

8.1 Elected Members up to 11/05/05

- Councillor Michael Desmond (Chair)
- Councillor Daniel Kemp (Vice Chair)
- Councillor Salma Rashid
- Councillor Eseoghene Okonedo
- Councillor Sharon Patrick
- Councillor Thanh Vu
- Councillor Maureen Middleton

- Scrutiny Officer: Bianca Garwood

APPENDIX ONE

Background information on Chelmsford YOI

Inmates' Experiences

When inmates are in their cells they are locked in to enable ease of monitoring. Closing the doors also decreased instances of bullying.

Inmates had a choice of sharing a cell with another inmate or having a cell by themselves. The officers informed us that most inmates chose to share. In these cases, officers attempted to pair up inmates with similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

A Typical Day at Chelmsford YOI

7.45am	Showers
8.20am - 11.30am	Educational workshops
11.30am - 1.30pm	Locked in cells for lunch
1.30pm - 4.30pm	Classes
Evening	Classes

The amount of time which inmates spent locked in their cells is dependent on how many classes they participated in.

Each cell contained a television which cost each inmate £0.77 a week. Access to a television depended on each inmate's privilege. If an inmate lost his TV privilege, he would be shifted to a cell with an inmate on a similar privilege scheme.

Chelmsford Morale

Morale at Chelmsford was low. At the date of the visit its ranking was now 131 out of the 135 prisons across the country. This ranking had fallen from 'good' because of changes in managerial practice and the criteria on which prisons are judged. The Prison Officer noted that perhaps different targets should be set for juvenile prisons.

Drugs in Chelmsford YOI

Like all prisons, drugs existed within the confines of Chelmsford. The prison runs two types of testing services - Voluntary Drugs Tests (VDT) and Mandatory Drugs Tests (MDT). The Prison Officer noted that because of staff shortages, the number of VDTs undertaken had fallen significantly.

If an inmate undergoes a drugs test voluntarily and is found to have ingested drugs, he is given 28 days before undergoing a mandatory drugs test.

All inmates with responsibilities, such as cleaners, undergo VDTs.

Educational Courses on Offer

Chelmsford offered computing, English, mathematics, gym instructor, first aid, and careers courses amongst others. A bid had been put in for money to run an industrial training course.

If on remand, inmates are not required to undertake any sort of course. However, once an inmate is convicted, undertaking a course was compulsory.

Amenities

Inmates determined what food they wished to eat by a voting process. With respect to reading materials, inmates are allowed to order newspapers and comics. Inmates also have access to a library.

Three computers are available to be shared between 115 inmates. While using the computers, inmates are under the supervision of officers. Inmates are not allowed to receive emails.

Inmates shower once a day and received a change of clothes weekly. Each cell was heated and the inmates are provided with additional blankets during the winter.

A prison magazine, written and edited by inmates, is published and circulated monthly.

A gym facility is also available to inmates. Before being allowed to join the gym, inmates are required to fill in an application form, undergo a fitness check and undertake a first aid course. Once approved, inmates sign a contract and are given an all-day induction to the gym. The Officer in charge of the gym stressed that the gym facility was not a privilege and many inmates did not utilise the gym. He noted that many inmates were not motivated to join the gym, often sleeping in and missing their fitness check appointments. It was possible for attendees to commence gym instruction courses. Once an inmate becomes appropriately qualified, he is able to help in the day-to-day running of the gym. The Officer referred to one inmate at Chelmsford who had qualified in the gym instructor's course and was on a one-day release programme with Fitness First where he was working as an instructor.

Ethnicity of Inmates

The level of inmates of Asian descent was on the rise. This figure corresponded with the increasing problem of cocaine within the Asian community.

Employment whilst in Chelmsford YOI

Inmates can undertake a variety of jobs which include cleaning kitchens for varying rates per hour.

Recognition of Cultural Diversity

Roman Catholic services are offered on Saturdays. Church of England services were offered on Sundays and Muslim prayer time occurred each Friday. Muslim inmates have mats in their cells to use for prayer whenever they wished.

Under-resourcing at Chelmsford

Over the last two years Chelmsford has undergone a cut in resources and consequently there are only 133 officers available (30 officers daily) to oversee 583 inmates. The officers' canteen has been closed and replaced with sandwich and drink machines.

Prison officers were experiencing a lack of affordable accommodation around the Chelmsford area as they are not included within the definition of 'key workers'. Chelmsford had also stopped the practice of transferring officers to stem the flow of officers wanting to transfer to prisons where more affordable accommodation was available.

Suicide Rate

To the prison officer's knowledge, there had only been one suicide at Chelmsford YOI in the last seven years. Two other inmates had been found hanging but had been found in time and had subsequently recovered. He noted that a lot of the self-harming carried out by inmates was a cry for help rather than an intentional attempt to commit suicide.