

## HM Prisons Inspectorate Report 2016 – what does it mean for the voluntary sector.

The annual report of HM Prisons Inspectorate was published last month. [Click here](#) for the report, or read the below overview of key aspects relating to the voluntary sector. The appearance of the annual report on prisons is usually significant, but the first report under the recently appointed Chief Inspector for Prisons, Peter Clarke, is one of the most sobering and comprehensive annual reports of recent years. We cannot do justice to the depth and scope of its findings here, but some of the areas in which the voluntary sector has featured will be highlighted.

An investigation into allegations of physically and sexually abusive behaviour by Serco staff at Yarl's Wood, found 'no evidence of a current widespread abusive or hostile culture among staff'. The high profile immigration removal centre holds women detainees. This year's inspection was the second following an undercover investigative programme for Channel 4 which showed instances of inappropriate staff behaviour. In previous years, there had been proven instances of inappropriate sexual relationships between staff and detainees which had led to staff dismissals. HM prison inspectors worked closely with voluntary sector agencies at the centre to confidentially interview detainees and to track women who had been released from Yarl's Wood in the previous six months. The high levels of vulnerability and distress experienced by female detainees underscores the valuable role of the voluntary sector agencies working in detention centres.

Conditions in detention centres held a prominent place in the report and the Inspectorate's comments were far removed from a ringing endorsement for the private sector companies – G4S, Serco and GEO which operate five Immigration removal centres.

Voluntary sector organisations have long-reported difficulties with accessing service users and clients in prison, and this continues to be contingent on staff availability and security concerns. Many VSOs operating 'through-the-gate' projects have complained about the dearth of referrals from the supply side – prisons, which has grown even worse since the implementation of Transforming Rehabilitation. The inspectorate report identified several factors which are stalling the full use of voluntary sector care and resources in the prison and resettlement systems. High numbers of prisoners still lack adequate OASyS assessments, and this is compounded by ongoing problems with information exchange, meaning that offender need is under-estimated. The implication for voluntary sector is that the need for their services is under-estimated or belatedly recognised.

Through the gate assessments by resettlement prisons and CRCs is too slow, and there is insufficient activity in referring to community-based services. There has been a 39% decrease in ROTL applications under more stringent rules, which has had a serious impact on employment and training projects for prisoners, many of which are provided by the voluntary sector (p22). Furthermore, the Samaritans Listeners scheme continues to operate in many prisons, but staff shortages mean that night time access for at-risk women in custody remained a difficulty (p55).

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The report was also able to comment on progress under Transforming Rehabilitation. Since May 2015 and the introduction of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to manage resettlement services, 89 prisons have been identified as resettlement prisons, including all local establishments, many category C and all category D prisons. Under this new model, CRC staff are based in all resettlement prisons, where they are responsible for the initial assessments of prisoner need, in conjunction with offender supervisors. CRCs are also responsible for the delivery of five mandatory areas of resettlement: accommodation support; finance, benefit and debt; victims of domestic violence; support for those previously involved in the sex industry; and employment guidance and advice. The CRC should review all aspects of resettlement at least 12 weeks before the prisoner's

release, linking back to the community CRC or probation service responsible for post-release supervision. For this model to be effective, all prisoners should be returned to a resettlement prison serving their release area in their last three months of sentence.

The report states: 'although there had been planning for this new model for some time before its formal introduction, we found that many prisons had still been slow to implement it. While most prisons managed basic custody screening reasonably well ... we found men were still arriving without documents and 'in some cases we examined, the screening was incomplete and unhelpful'.

The inspectors also reported that prisons remained unclear about the TR resettlement model or how it should be implemented. The work of the community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) was still not embedded in the prisons (see also p.49), and neither staff nor prisoners had sufficient understanding of the CRC function. More joint working was needed to ensure that the CRCs, the offender management unit (OMU) and the resettlement team worked effectively together. Some CRCs have developed through-the-gate services but these are patchy and variable.

Support for prisoners leaving custody without accommodation remains the most problematic and inconsistent aspect of resettlement. Voluntary sector and social housing providers have expressed their frustration at the lack of coordination between them and CRCs. CRCs are not obliged to provide housing, but simply to signpost prisoners to housing services.