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**HARMONDSWORTH IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE –  
PROGRESS, BUT CONCERNS ABOUT IMMINENT EXPANSION**

There had been demonstrable improvements at Harmondsworth after a troubled history, but the imminent expansion, with prison-type accommodation, would pose a considerable challenge, said Dame Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons, publishing the report of an announced inspection of the immigration removal centre near Heathrow.

The report is the most positive to be issued about the centre, though there were serious concerns about healthcare. A new block, to open in June, will double the size of the centre, with new accommodation built to higher security prison standards, making Harmondsworth the biggest removal centre in Europe.

Inspectors were pleased to find that:

- detainees in general felt safe in the centre;
- freedom of movement around the centre had lightened the atmosphere and may have contributed to a drop in incidents, use of force and separation;
- relationships between detainees and staff were cordial, and improving;

- the welfare team provided a good and much-needed service, but they were overstretched;
- detainees' access to the internet and to mobile phones had greatly improved contact with the outside world; and
- the range of available activities had increased, with enough work for a third of detainees and opportunities for education.

Detainees' feelings of insecurity were strongly linked to uncertainty about immigration cases, not helped by insufficient legal advice, limited contact with the immigration team and often uninformative reviews which did not fully take into account evidence of mental ill-health or previous torture.

Inspectors also noted with concern that:

- healthcare was unacceptably poor, in terms of the approach of healthcare staff and the quality and quantity of provision, particularly in relation to mental health and primary care;
- procedures for monitoring and preventing suicide, self-harm and bullying needed further development;
- staff were insufficiently proactive in supporting detainees and identifying their concerns using interpretation; and
- detainees' first arrival in the centre was sometimes after excessive and unexplained movements around the detention estate.

Anne Owers said:

“This is the most positive report we have issued on Harmondsworth. It reflects considerable work by managers and staff to improve the approach and provision at a difficult centre, with a mixed population, some of it very transient. This is to be commended. There is, however, further work to be done, both by the centre and the UK Border Agency.

“We were also very concerned about the potential impact of the new building, about to be opened in June. This would provide prison-type

accommodation, in small and somewhat oppressive cells – at odds with the atmosphere and facilities in the current centre. It would also double the population, making Harmondsworth the biggest removal centre in Europe. This combination will pose a considerable challenge to managers in seeking to embed recent progress and run a single, safe and decent centre.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors:**

1. A copy of the report can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Prisons website from 26 May 2010 at [www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons](http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons)
2. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is an independent inspectorate, inspecting places of detention to report on conditions and treatment, and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public.
3. This announced inspection was carried out from 11-15 January 2010.
4. Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre, near Heathrow, holds adult male detainees on behalf of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and is run by GEO Group Ltd.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons in HMI Prisons Press Office on 0207 035 2123 or 07880 787452 from 0915 to 1415 Monday to Friday if you would like more information or to request an interview with Dame Anne Owers. Or email [jane.parsons@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jane.parsons@justice.gsi.gov.uk).