

Embargo: 00:01 Wednesday 12 April 2006

Press release

Private prisons continue to put profit before people

The Howard League for Penal Reform today (12 April) welcomed the publication of the Chief Inspector of Prisons' report into Doncaster prison which shows yet another private prison failing to put people before profit.

The Chief Inspector paints a depressingly familiar picture. She highlights:

- squalid living conditions, including dirty and graffitied cells with inadequate or missing bedding and pillows, and broken toilets and televisions
- an unclean, poorly maintained and unsafe environment for newly arrived prisoners on the so-called first-night centre, which is specifically intended to provide a less harsh environment for people newly arriving at the prison
- that only 29% of young black and minority ethnic prisoners felt that staff treated them with respect

Commenting on the report, Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, said today:

"This report exposes the fallacy promulgated by the Home Office that private prisons have helped to improve prison conditions, raised standards or fostered advances in the decent treatment of prisoners and staff. Doncaster shows that this is not the case. Unsurprisingly, the Chief Inspector draws attention to the fact that those areas in which the prison is failing are those in which it was not contractually obliged by the Home Office to meet particular standards. Despite the manifest failings of private prisons, the Government has failed to learn the lesson and has recently confirmed its intention to continue with the privatisation of the probation service which will result in the needs of vulnerable and challenging people being jeopardized in the pursuit of profit."

"Doncaster prison is grossly overcrowded, a scandal that the private companies running several of the prisons for profit have allowed to happen. The private sector could have made a stand against overcrowding but instead has caved in to the pursuit of profit at the expense of decent conditions and rehabilitation."

ends

Notes to editors

- In February 2006 Doncaster prison was holding 40% more people (1,082) than it was designed for (771).
- There have been 18 suicides at Doncaster prison since it opened.
- Serco (formerly Premier Custodial Group Ltd) runs Doncaster prison. They have previously been heavily criticised by the Chief Inspector of Prisons in the running of Ashfield Young Offender Institution where the level of care given to vulnerable children was so poor that the running of the prison had to be temporarily taken back into the public sector.
- Doncaster prison cost taxpayers £19.2m during 2004-05.