

'Needs of vulnerable prisoners must be met as part of continued efforts to improve Maghaberry Prison' say Inspectors

The latest in a series of inspection reports on Maghaberry Prison has found that while management are continuing to work to improve the prison's performance, shortcomings have been found in the care and support provided to the most vulnerable prisoners.

"This unannounced review by a multi-disciplinary team of experienced Inspectors from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in England and Wales, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and the Education and Training Inspectorate was a continuation of our follow-up work after the publication of the findings of our May 2015 inspection of Maghaberry," said Brendan McGuigan, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland.

"I welcome the drive, determination, innovation and creativity shown by the leadership team and staff to stabilise the prison, to improve outcomes for those committed to their care and implement the nine recommendations made two years ago.

"However this positive work and the desire to deliver a more stable, safe environment for prisoners and staff must ensure the needs of vulnerable prisoners are addressed," said Mr McGuigan.

"Despite a reduction in the overall number of men self harming within the prison, Inspectors had significant concerns around the management and care of men who had or were at risk of self harming.

"I am concerned that despite the critical reports into deaths in custody and serious self harm, some important lessons have not been learned, even though a single over-arching death in custody action plan had been developed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service," said Mr McGuigan.

The Chief Inspector said that the continued lack of a safer custody strategy at Maghaberry remained an issue for the Inspection Team and further work was required by the wider criminal justice and healthcare systems to provide alternatives to custody for highly vulnerable prisoners.

"Maghaberry Prison does not provide a therapeutic environment. We were therefore concerned to find the prison was being used as a safe place by the courts while mental health assessments took place.

"In our view this is inappropriate and we have recommended the Departments of Justice and Health should develop an agreed pathway to prevent individuals being admitted to prison for an emergency mental health assessment," he said.

Reflecting on the positive work on-going at the prison, Mr McGuigan said the day-to-day regime at Maghaberry was more stable and reliable with fewer restrictions around movement and activity occurring.

Progress was also found in relation to education and healthcare.

"Educational provision by Belfast Met is now well established and the picture is one of improvement with a general step forward made in the quality of courses and activities and motivation of the participating men.

"In relation to healthcare, a new GP clinical lead had been appointed and missed appointments had dropped from 50 to 13 per cent. Support for prisoners with long-term health conditions had also been developed," said Mr McGuigan.

"I welcome the work undertaken in these areas and the commitment and actions taken by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and Belfast Met to raise standards."

Mr McGuigan also voiced his support for the work ongoing within Maghaberry Prison to stem the flow of illegal drugs into the prison.

"I am encouraged by the ongoing operations to tackle illicit drugs coming into the prison. However the misuse of prescription medication and the tendency of some prisoners to experiment with any substance available to get a 'high' remains an issue.

"I support the work being undertaken at Maghaberry to deal with the underlying issues and risks that threaten the safety of staff and prisoners.

"It is essential that the leadership team within the prison and senior managers within the Northern Ireland Prison Service continue to maintain a focus on delivering improvement at the facility.

"They must make every effort to address the concerns raised in this inspection and maintain the momentum towards positive change," he concluded.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Copies of the May 2015; January 2016 and September 2016 inspection reports can be downloaded from 'The Inspections' sections of the CJI website - <http://www.cjini.org/>
- The Low Impact Review of the high security facility was conducted from 3-4 April 2017. It does not re-inspect all areas of the prison or deal with the issues in the same level of detail as full unannounced or announced inspections. It presents a snapshot of the experience of prisoners held there and a sense of how the prison was progressing the nine inspection recommendations made in 2015.
- **For further information or to arrange an interview with Brendan McGuigan, Chief Inspector or Criminal Justice, please contact Meloney McVeigh Communication Manager, Criminal Justice Inspection on 0772 558 1835 or 028 90 765764 (s/board).**

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