

Update to the report of the full
unannounced inspection in April 2011 of
HMP Belmarsh

by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

Background

- 1.1 HM Inspectorate of Prisons carried out a full unannounced inspection of HMP Belmarsh in April 2011. The report was published in September 2011. Following the disturbances in English cities at the end of August 2011, the Inspectorate visited the prison again on 31 August to establish whether there had been an increase in admissions and whether this had had any significant impact on the findings from the original report. The visit focused on a small number of areas likely to be most affected by any change to the population.
- 1.2 As a response to the disturbances, the prison service had raised the maximum number of prisoners (the operational capacity) who could be held in Belmarsh from 902 to 926. At the time of our second visit, the population was 917, representing an increase of about 29 prisoners since the operational capacity was raised, and an overall increase of 52 prisoners since our full inspection in April 2011.
- 1.3 We were told that there had been little change to the overall population profile. About 30% of the population were remanded and about half were between the ages of 21 and 29. We were also informed that no prisoners under the age of 21 had been admitted since the new arrangements had taken effect. Prisoners under the age of 21 were, on the whole, admitted to ISIS, Cookham Wood or Feltham.
- 1.4 The prison was not designated to receive prisoners from the newly convened 24-hour London courts. Many of the new prisoners were decanted from other London prisons or diverted at court to make space at those establishments that admitted prisoners during the night.

Safety

- 1.5 There appeared to be little impact on the prison's ability to process new prisoners and reception and first night procedures were much the same. Reception opening hours had been extended due to late arrivals on a few occasions, but we were assured that all prisoners were able to access full first night procedures.
- 1.6 All prisoners continued to be admitted to the first night centre and all had detailed needs assessments carried out. The prison was still able to offer all prisoners a full induction.
- 1.7 There were no changes to the number of open ACCT (suicide and self-harm monitoring) documents or a noticeable rise in the number of violent incidents. Twenty-eight ACCT documents had been opened in August and, at the time of our second visit on 31 August, 19 were still open. This was broadly consistent with our findings during the full inspection. There were no prisoners on ACCT who were connected with the disturbances.
- 1.8 There had been no increase in the number of violent incidents, the number of adjudications for fights or incidents involving the use of force. The number of prisoners in the vulnerable prisoners unit remained the same but the overspill cells on the top landing of spur two were no longer in use for vulnerable prisoners as they had been during the full inspection. The roll on the segregation unit had not increased during August.

Respect

- 1.9 At the time of the original inspection we noted that too many cells designed for two prisoners were used to accommodate three and were cramped and lacked sufficient furniture and storage facilities. We were told in this update visit that additional accommodation had primarily been provided by the conversion of double cells into triple cells.
- 1.10 At the time of our second visit it appeared that drug and health care services had been unaffected by the increase in prisoners.

Purposeful activity

- 1.11 There had been little change to the prison regime. Our full inspection found that there were considerably fewer activity places than prisoners, and an increase in numbers was likely to make matters worse. Time out of cell remained low for the prisoners without scheduled activity or those who were allocated part-time work and whose time unlocked was, on the whole, restricted to association and exercise periods.

Resettlement

- 1.12 The short-term impact on resettlement services appeared negligible. However, shortfalls identified in our full inspection, particularly in accommodation services, were likely to be further aggravated by an increase in the prison population.
- 1.13 At the time of our second visit it appeared that provision for prisoners to maintain contact with their families had been unaffected by the recent changes.

Conclusion

- 1.14 At the time of our second visit to HMP Belmarsh on 31 August 2011, the admissions resulting from the disturbances in English cities at the start of the month had had only a minor impact. We concluded that the healthy prison assessments set out in our full report of September 2011 remained valid.

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