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HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
CHARLIE TAYLOR

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Justice and Home Affairs Committee
House of Lords
London
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Dear Justice and Home Affairs Committee,

Publication of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons' Annual Report 2023-24

HM Inspectorate of Prisons today published its 2023-24 Annual Report.

The report describes the work of the Inspectorate in 2023-24 and summarises the findings of 79 reports from inspections, independent reviews of progress and thematic review from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. I issued four Urgent Notifications during this period.

Purposeful activity continued to be the worst performing area, with it being judged as poor or not sufficiently good in 31 of the 39 adult prisons we inspected. Violence and illicit drugs disrupted daily life in men's local and training prisons and we found concerning increases in suicide and self-harm. A lack of investment in ageing infrastructure and an inability to commission or undertake building work contributed to declining living conditions across the prison estate. Far too many prisoners in 2023-24 shared cells designed for one person.

Interactions with staff were often perfunctory and transactional. A common source of frustration among prisoners was new, short-term, or inexperienced staff who were unfamiliar with the prison, the wing or the prisoners. Jails often failed to prepare those coming to the end of their sentence for return to the community. Prison offender manager shortages impeded effective offender management, we found gaps in resettlement provision, weaknesses in the management of public protection and prisons continued to struggle to provide accommodation support. Despite record numbers being held in prison on remand, we continued to find gaps in provision and work to maintain family relationships was often limited.

More positively, we found good or reasonably good outcomes in most of the seven open prisons inspected this year.

In the youth estate there had been a breakdown of behaviour management and an overreliance on keeping children apart. Relationships between staff and children were often poor and children were not receiving the education to which they were entitled. Establishments were now holding more young adults and children on remand.

There was a worrying rise in disturbances in immigration detention as the population grew. At Yarl's Wood, we found increasingly prison-like conditions, and the safety of detainees and their access to activities had deteriorated significantly. Our inspections of short-term holding facilities found that Border Force had made substantial improvements. However, the leadership of Manston continued to be a major concern, with inspectors having little confidence that Manston would function sufficiently well when numbers rose once again.

The majority of charter flights to remove detainees over the last year were to Albania. On the flight that we inspected, we saw improvements in overall organisation, staff practices and culture.

I am very happy to discuss any comments or queries the Committee may have on the report.

CHARLIE TAYLOR