Dear Mr Davies

Prison Provision in Wales, Oral Evidence Session, 22 May 2018

I am writing to you following the evidence that I provided at the oral evidence session held on 22 May 2018 as part of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into prison provision in Wales. During that session, I committed to reviewing our inspection findings in order to provide the Committee with a further response to three questions. I set out that response below.

Question 179-180: County Lines

The Committee asked whether we have seen evidence from inspections that placing people, in particular young offenders, away from home has “brought out a county lines effect” for other inmates and created associations with gangs that were not there previously. This question was in reference to Young Offenders Institution (YOI) Parc, however, I have also addressed YOIs that hold children across England.

During our most recent inspection of YOI Parc in October 2017, we were told by staff that “there were increasing concerns about gang cultures in the unit. Evidence indicated that there were ‘postcode’ gangs where boys from particular areas formed allegiances. While not an immediate risk, it was sensible for the establishment to focus on these concerns to avoid escalation.” Data from our survey of children at the prison showed that few boys reported having problems with gangs on arrival or stated that they were victimised because of gang related issues during their time at YOI Parc. Further, inspectors did not find that county lines associations had an impact on the prison population at YOI Parc and have not found this to be a problem across YOIs holding children’s in England more widely.

As I referenced during the session, our distance from home thematic,¹ conducted in 2016 showed benefits for some children in being held further from their home as they were away from gang influences, or an area where their offence had attracted local attention. Even though this was the case for some children, HMI Prisons still recommend that children should be held as close to home as possible due to the positive effects of family contact on preventing reoffending.

Question 190-191: Tripling up

During the session, the Committee asked whether I had seen any establishments where there were three prisoners being held in a cell. I have checked our latest report for the inspection of HMP Swansea, undertaken in August 2017 and can confirm that there were some cells designed for two which were accommodating three prisoners at the time of inspection. HMI Prisons has also found a small number of other prisons holding three prisoners in one cell during recent inspections, for example, at our most recent inspection of HMP Belmarsh (2018). Information on the detrimental impact that cell crowding can have on the mental and

physical health of prisoners is outlined in our 2017 thematic report on living conditions in prison.\(^2\)

**Question 233-234: Welsh Language Provision**

The Committee asked how HMI Prisons assess Welsh language provision in Welsh prisons. During inspections of Welsh prisons, inspectors will make a judgement on whether the prison has put strategies in place to promote Welsh language skills and whether the prison has enabled prisoners to develop their use of Welsh language. HMI Prisons have recently reported improvements in the provision of Welsh language in prisons in Wales. For example, at Usk and Prescoed (2017), we reported that prisoners who spoke Welsh as a first language used Welsh in all areas of the prison and that the prison had put Welsh mentor-led classes in place for non-Welsh speakers. Similarly, at Parc adults (2016), we reported that a Welsh-speakers’ forum had been established to enable the prison to take account of the views of Welsh speakers and that there were more courses available for prisoners who wished to learn Welsh.

The Committee also asked about the provision for Welsh speakers in English prisons. HMI Prisons expect that prisoners are treated equitably and according to their individual needs. This includes having equal access to health, well-being and social care services regardless of language barriers, having support in education and having access to information about the prison in a format and language the prisoner can easily understand.\(^3\) During inspections, HMI Prisons assess a prison’s ability to provide for all individuals who speak a different language. Were HMI Prisons to be told during an inspection about a lack of Welsh language provision in a prison in England, we would follow this up during the inspection.

I hope that this information is helpful and sufficiently answers the Committee’s questions but please do not hesitate to contact me if any further information is required. HMI Prisons welcomes the opportunity to be of assistance to the Committee in this and forthcoming inquiries.

Your sincerely,

Peter Clarke CVO OBE QPM
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

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