

CASE STUDY – HMP LOWDHAM GRANGE

The Prison

HMP Lowdham Grange is a Category B training prison located near Nottingham, and is operated by Serco under a twenty-five year Design, Construct, Manage and Finance (DCMF) agreement. The prison opened in 1998 and currently has an operational capacity of 500 places but has been officially overcrowded by 64 for some time. The prison manages prisoners with a Determinate sentence of at least 4 years, with at least 12 months left to serve. Based on the operating model of the prison, prisoners allocated to the prison must be Labour grade 1 and 2.

The Prison Model

The model is predicated on the provision of work through Industries as the major regime activity, which was the main model employed for training prisons at the time of the inception of the prison. The prison has a major Industries complex with six main units that offered a diverse but low skilled, mainly non-technical work set with very limited links to vocational training and qualifications. The prison also offers a range of education services, limited vocational training courses (Painting and Decorating and Industrial Cleaning) as well as some Offender Behaviour course including ETS along with Psychology and Counselling support. Up until December 2005, the prison also operated a drugs treatment programme, though the funding was withdrawn by the HMPS National Drug Programme Delivery Unit (NDPDU) as the programme was non-accredited. The subsequent problems arising were exacerbated by a depleted CARATs service team.

Performance

In the history of the life of the prison, the contractor Serco, has performed to satisfaction overall in both its operational and contractual requirements. It has achieved continually improving performance results to the point that it was graded as Level 4 in its performance rating. In mid 2006 however, whilst performance has continued to prove satisfactory, the achievements in its performance has fluctuated in some areas and the prison was graded as Level 3, where it remains at this point.

Audit

In March 2006, the prison was inspected under a full announced inspection by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP). The Inspection Team found the prison to be a largely safe establishment, with mutually respectful staff-prisoner relationships and plenty of time out of cell for prisoners. However, HMCIP criticised the fact that the prison was based on an outdated model and was too focused on repetitive paid work of little vocational benefit with insufficient attention to education, programmes and reintegration services. In particular, the report noted that, whilst time out of cell was good and 80% of prisoners were in full time work, the prison was not performing sufficiently well in the two of the four tests of a healthy prison namely Purposeful Activity and Resettlement. The Inspection Team found that the Industries work was menial and repetitive and had no key focus on reducing re-offending or enhanced links to vocational qualifications so that prisoners had greater access to better quality work opportunities opportunity to obtain appropriate work based qualifications. Inspection Team also raised concerns over the limited offender behaviour programmes and re-integration services and that there was no accredited drug treatment programme. It went on to identify that gym regime activities were limited and conditions were cramped.

Response

In February 2006, the area management responsibility for HMP Lowdham Grange was transferred from the Office for Contracted Prisons (OCP) to the East Midlands Regional Offender Manager (ROM). At the same time, negotiations were underway between the Authority and Serco to build a new houseblock to accommodate 128 prisoners and provide additional ancillary services. The feedback report for the HMCIP Inspection Team and the advent of the ROM as Area Manager for the prison were pivotal in the drive to shape and develop the contractor services and the expansion programme proposals in respect of the provision of regime services to those that would truly meet offender needs and also commit to the objective of reducing re-offending.

Industries

Industries remains a key regime activity within the prison and, under the current contractual arrangement, where the Industries contract work is self-funding for Serco and supports the financing of prisoners' wages, it is difficult to see how this will change without undue penalty to the contractor. Nonetheless, whilst there is still much to be done by the contractor to enhance the quality of contract work available to prisoners, which can also support the delivery of work based vocational qualifications, significant work has already been achieved in driving the contractor to attract new business and expand internal education links into the current contracts, giving the potential to deliver meaningful outputs in the medium term.

Vocational Training

The expansion programme incorporates a significant increase in facilities for vocational training at the prison, with specific focus on delivering programmes based on external employer and services needs. A dedicated training kitchen is now in operation, which was previously co-located in the main kitchen facility, and boasts a staff service point and café area. Painting and Decorating, a vocational course previously available to prisoners, is now in operation in a dedicated training facility. Industrial Cleaning, which previously used to be taught on wings on the job, now has a dedicated training unit in operation. All three programmes are linked to vocational qualification awards at different levels. Further, all three courses enable appropriately qualified prisoners to be considered for employment within the prison. Another two dedicated vocational training units have been delivered to provide Construction (Brickwork and Plastering) and Plumbing and Electrical courses. Recruitment is in place to provide specialist tutors and it is planned that these courses will start soon after the new houseblock becomes operational. Again, these programmes will be linked to key vocational qualifications that can be readily transferable into the general labour market upon release.

Education

Following the appointment in 2006 of a new Education Services Manager with a considerable Higher Education background, the Education Department and education services available to prisoners has expanded considerably. Delivery of education is 73% above planned target and output for Basic Skills and education/vocational qualifications awards are forecast to exceed target easily. The expansion programme is providing additional education facilities that will support the contractor's vision of the prison being recognised as an education "centre of excellence". The additional facilities include an IT academy, a dedicated Arts class and other classrooms with modern teaching facilities. In the first year of operation, Basic Skills and education/vocational qualifications targets are set to increase by 17% and 10% respectively and it is expected that further increases will be gained in subsequent years.

Gymnasium

One of the HMCIP criticisms fell upon the facilities available and the limited regime activities provided by the gymnasium. Unfortunately, this was not catered for as part of the original expansion programme. However, continued consultation with the contractor has proved beneficial in that they have recognised the threat to their Purposeful Activity and have decided to expand the current gymnasium facilities by creating a new weights and cardio-vascular centre. They have also involved the Education Department in developing the range of associated courses with qualifications available to prisoners, some of which have been implemented already. The contractor has done this at their own expense.

Offender Behaviour Programmes

This is one area that has not seen any substantial benefit as part of the expansion programme and it is recognised, both within the Authority and the Contractor that this is an area requiring attention. The Regional Offender Manager is shortly to meet formally with the contractor to discuss commissioning and reducing re-offending with the objective of developing a strategy specific to HMP Lowdham Grange that will seek to enhance delivery of these programmes subject to offender needs.

Drug Treatment

Regrettably, despite being non-accredited, the removal of the drug treatment programme without replacement was deeply felt at the prison and by the contractor and has had a contributing effect on the prison performance. Had such a decision been considered at a time when the East Midlands ROM became responsible for the prison, this would not have happened. It was recognised that this action would not only affect the needs of prisoners but would make it inherently difficult for the contractor to manage the prison safely. Lobbying was made by the ROM in support of the contractor and the Authority was able to provide additional funding as part of the expansion programme for a dedicated accredited drugs treatment programme. Further complications have since arisen however, through negotiation between the ROM and the contractor, the funding will now be used to significantly enhance the CARATs Team on the basis that it will deliver appropriate treatments to allow better assessment for a drug treatment programme, which is planned for further review by the end of performance year 07/08. It should be noted that the contractor has also been successful in obtaining capital and resource funding from the Integrated Drug Treatment Strategy (IDTS) team, which is being used to enhance facilities and resources available to deliver drug treatment to prisoners. The enhancing of the CARATs team should complement this well and put the prison on a better footing to deliver drug treatments over the longer term.

Summary

There is no doubt, as evidenced by the findings of the HMCIP Inspection Team, that the Industrial training model is outdated, taking into account the needs of prisoners and the requirements of reducing re-offending. It is not however, a model that can straightforwardly be replaced. Notwithstanding this, the progressive changes required and being made at HMP Lowdham Grange do present the determination by all to shape and deliver services that actually meet offender needs and which not only support the objective of reducing re-offending but seek to deliver value for money. It also reflects the extent that the contractor can demonstrate innovation and flexibility in meeting such demands.