

ANNUAL REPORT 2007

Last year's report highlighted the work of the Justice Minister's Review of Prison Visiting Committees and, whilst its recommendations have still to be implemented, the first of these is worthy of note.

"Visiting Committees continue to serve a valuable function distinctive from other players and should be retained and their specific features capitalised on to contribute to the wider reforms taking place in the criminal justice system."

Also worthy of note is the fact that one of the seven virtues depicted among the 15th Century carvings at Rosslyn Chapel is, "Visiting prisons". Thus we have a 15th century virtue enshrined in statute in the 19th century and now reaffirmed in the 21st century as a "valuable function distinctive from other players". This is a noble heritage in a nation which cares for those detained in prison.

It therefore gives me much pleasure to present our annual report for 2007 which offers an overview of the Association's work and the commitment our members give to monitoring independently the human rights and conditions within Scotland's prisons.

The Association and its members continue to be concerned by many issues within the prison estate and which are addressed in this report. Whilst the Association wholeheartedly supports the drive to reduce Reoffending, delivered through a programme of ambitious initiatives, the ever-increasing prison population and short sentences continue to give cause for concern.

These two factors compromise the delivery of effective programmes which enable prisoners to address their Reoffending and return to a productive lifestyle following release. We may differ at times about SPS and government policy and its effect on the prison and justice system, but these differences never deflect us from undertaking our role with an impartial, passionate dedication to the welfare of prisoners who are detained by the state.

I pay warm tribute to all prison visiting committee members throughout the prison estate and to the members of legalised police cells committees who work so tirelessly on behalf of the justice department and the public to monitor and ensure the highest of standards in the humane treatment of prisoners. My Vice-Convener and the members of the Association Executive Committee have given so much of their time and talents over the year and have ensured the work of the Association meets its objectives.

It has been a privilege to work with all our members, who labour with such enthusiasm to meet constant challenge and change.

Neil IC Powrie - *Convener*

Neil IC Powrie



Contents

The Association of Visiting Committees	2
Website	2
AVC Training Visits.....	3
Meeting with HM Inspector of Prisons.....	4
AVC Annual Conference 2006.....	6
Promotion and Publicity	7
Monitoring Reliance.....	8
Training	9
Changes.....	10
Review of Visiting Committees.....	11
AVC Budget and Finance	11
Association	12
Meet the Executive Committee	12



THE ASSOCIATION OF VISITING COMMITTEES

The Association of Visiting Committees for Scottish Penal Establishments was formed in 1988 to promote the effective operation of Visiting Committees which are statutory bodies of volunteers appointed to monitor conditions in prisons. Visiting Committee members are expected to understand the requirements of prison management and the difficulties of prisoners, and to exercise their judgements without fear or partiality as completely independent arbiters of the prison system.

The key objectives of the Association are-

- To provide a forum for committees to discuss and exchange information
- To recommend standard practices by which committees should operate
- To discuss penal affairs and make recommendations to relevant parties
- To run training programmes for members
- To produce training literature for members
- To clarify prison rules for members
- To set standards for members' attendances and visits to establishments
- To publicise the role of Visiting Committees for the benefit of the public

MEMBERSHIP – All Visiting Committees (including legalised police cells) are entitled to membership of the Association.

Appendix 1 on page 12 shows a breakdown of the number of members in each committee. Full meetings of Association members are held quarterly throughout the year, with meetings held in June, September and December of 2006 and March 2007.

MANAGEMENT – Management of Association affairs is devolved to an Executive Committee, including development and delivery of training programmes and the Association's annual conference.

During the year under review the Executive Committee met on 6 occasions in Edinburgh and at Scottish Prison Service College, Polmont. Members comprised:

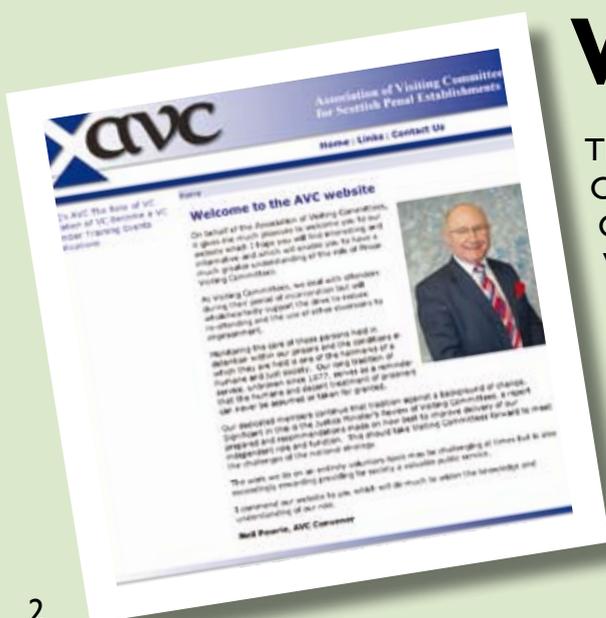
- Cllr William Clarke - Convener, Glenochil VC
- Mrs Anne Freebairn - Convener, Greenock VC (elected Dec 2006)
- Mrs Moira Graham - Convener, Cornton Vale O21 VC (retired Dec 2006)
- Mr Charles Heberton MBE - Convener, Shotts VC
- Cllr Gordon Leslie - Convener, Aberdeen VC (retired Dec 2006)
- Mr Bruce Logan - Convener, Edinburgh VC
- Mr Neil Powrie - Convener, Noranside VC and Association Convener
- Mr Jim Scott - Convener, Cornton Vale U21 VC
- Mr Ron Scrimgeour - Member Noranside VC and Association Vice-Convener
- Mr Ian Smyth - Convener, Oban LPC (elected Dec 2006)

WEBSITE

The launch of the AVC website in March 2007 now provides Visiting Committees with an opportunity to promote their work within the Criminal justice system and to raise public awareness of the role of Visiting Committees.

The website also acts as a reference point for Visiting Committee members by providing information on AVC activities including conference and seminars, as well as training materials and resources to equip members better to undertake their role.

Visit: www.avc.org.uk



AVC – TRAINING VISITS - APRIL 2006-MARCH 2007

The Association has always valued visits to establishments as a vital part of ongoing training. Since the formation of the new Executive in December 2006, responsibility for arranging and co-ordinating these visits has been given to Charles Heberton, Convener of Shotts VC and Executive Committee member. Charlie has put a good deal of hard work into arranging the visits undertaken since his appointment and he has prepared the following list of visits during the reporting period.

7 February 2006: Visit to HMP Low Moss. 15 VC members attended. The members who were there found the visit very interesting, not least because of the fact that they were aware that, due to expected closure of the establishment later in 2007, there may not be many more opportunities for such visits.



HMP Edinburgh

3 May 2006: Visit to HMP Edinburgh – 21 VC members attended. This visit afforded AVC members an opportunity to see the development of the prison and the many changes and improvements since the last visit. The capacity of HMP Edinburgh is now 750-800 prisoners, making it one of the largest prisons in the SPS estate.

10 May 2006: Visit to The State Hospital, Carstairs. 20 VC members attended. This visit, which was limited to 20 persons for security and safety reasons, gave members a most interesting insight into the workings of the State Hospital, which the visitors learned is one of 4 such hospitals in the UK. It is a maximum security establishment which houses patients admitted under the requirements of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 and related legislation because of their dangerous, violent or criminal propensities. The Hospital has 600 staff caring for 240 patients (95% male, 5% female), average age 39 years. The visit provided members with an idea of the work which goes on there, although members would have liked to see more – impossible due to necessary constraints.

6-8 June 2006: Twenty members took advantage of a trip to Dublin to see the Mountjoy complex (St Patrick's Institution; The Dochas Centre and Mountjoy Prison itself) and Wheatfield Prison. This was a very comprehensive visit with much to be learned. The members also took the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the workings of Visiting Committees in Ireland.

HMP Shotts



9 December 2006: Visit to HMP Shotts. 13 AVC members attended and were welcomed by William Paton on behalf of the Governor. Much of interest was noted at Shotts and the new top-end facility, Kerr House, impressed the visitors and would enhance the establishment.

6 March 2007: Visit to HMP Barlinnie. Over 30 AVC members attended and it was clear that the numbers involved in almost everything from prisoners to methadone dispensing are quite different to any other prison in Scotland. Once again this was a most interesting visit with much learned.

HMP Barlinnie



It is now 2 years since the Association took the decision to separate prison visits from business meetings which had traditionally taken place on the same day in prisons around Scotland. The very greatly increased number of AVC members taking the opportunity to visit other prisons and to meet with the VC members involved certainly shows that this decision has been popular with the membership. We look forward to next year's prison visit programme.

MEETING WITH HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS

The Executive Committee of the AVC met with Dr Andrew McLellan, and John McCaig, Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons at Saughton House in early May.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss matters of mutual interest. Dr McLellan told members that he had held office for 4.5 years and that his appointment had been confirmed until June 2009. During his term in office he has carried out a full Inspection of every prison in Scotland as well as numerous follow-up visits.

Dr McLellan said that during the following year it is the intention to publish a report on the conditions and treatment of prisoners under escort (possibly June 2007). At this time HMCIP said it was inappropriate to share the content of the report ahead of publication but confirmed it would cover how prisoners are handed over to the escort services; information available at that stage; circumstances of prisoners when they are under escort; physical circumstances regarding how they are treated; conditions and treatment of prisoners where they are held under escort. The report will be confined to escorts to and from courts. It is hoped that a further report will be published later covering the conditions and treatment of prisoners under escort to and from hospitals, churches, funerals, etc.

Future onsite inspections of prisons and treatment of prisoners will take a slightly different format. Prisons to be inspected during 2007/08 are HM YOI Polmont and HMP Kilmarnock as well as a third establishment (unannounced full inspection).

Two thematic inspections will also be carried out during 2007/08:-

1. At the request of the Minister of Justice, an inspection surrounding the circumstances around the release of dangerous prisoners (ie preparation for release of dangerous prisoners – both in terms of the prisoner's perspective and also preparation carried out in terms of arrangements, diary dates, etc. for release). The report will cover what happens at release and what happens thereafter in terms of supervision.

This will be a joint thematic inspection with the Social Work Inspectorate which will be undertaking part of the work inside the prison while HMCIP department (under David McAllister) will cover the areas pertaining to outside the prison.

During the course of this inspection, HMCIP envisages discussion with VCs and in due course will discuss with the AVC the best means of achieving input (ie either via the AVC or through direct discussion with VC members).

2. Mental Health in Prisons

This report is HMCIP led, and arises from concern regarding the increase in numbers of mental health and serious mental health problems of prisoners.

John McCaig will lead this inspection, the scope of which has yet to be finalised with discussions still ongoing. but will include input from professional psychologists, healthcare and psychiatric services. HMCIP is conscious that this report must remain focussed and also recognises the limitations of its scope in terms of team size and input and financial constraints.

Both thematic reports are scheduled to be published within twelve months.



Dr Andrew McLellan,
HM Chief Inspector
of Prisons



John McCaig,
Deputy Chief
Inspector of Prisons

MEETING WITH HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS (continued)

Standards Used in the Inspection of Prisons in Scotland

John McCaig noted that the standards had been published in August 2006 and had been well received. They cover three main sections: safety, decency and opportunities for self improvement. (copy available from HMCIP website: www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1102/0036494.pdf)

The purpose of the standards is to regularise the Inspectorate's functions and provide:

- information to staff and prisoners on what the Inspectorate aims to achieve including minimum acceptable levels
- guidance to staff for daily work in prisons
- prisoners with a baseline to assess their treatment from staff
- prison managers with a standard against which to monitor performance of the establishment
- a structure that also is known to staff and prisoners for carrying out inspections
- HMCIP with a structure for publication of reports



HMCIP response to questions raised by AVC Executive

1. Reliance

- The Reliance contract is complex.
- It is not part of the VC role to monitor or review Reliance contract because Reliance is not a part of the SPS.

- It is the role of the VC to monitor Scottish penal establishments.
- The Reliance contract is monitored by SPS.
- HMCIP role is to inspect the conditions and treatment of prisoners under escort.
- HMCIP view that a monitoring body for contract services such as Reliance is required, but not role of HMCIP or VC.
- Noted that there is a complaints procedure for prisoners, viz. prisoner completes a form of complaint against Reliance and forwards directly to Reliance. Reliance respond to prisoner and send a copy to SPS (must be done within four weeks).
- Suggestion that comments on Reliance be included in Governor's report to VCs.

2. Future. Collaboration between HMCIP and AVC/VCS

- HMCIP wishes to reflect on this and discuss further with colleagues before reaching any conclusion/decision.

3. Future contribution from HMCIP to AVC/VC Training Programmes

- HMCIP enthusiastically welcomed opportunity to be involved in VC Training – suggestion would be on an annual basis.

4. Future meetings with HMCIP

- HMCIP agreed to hold annual meeting with AVC Executive.

Actions:-

- HMCIP to arrange annual meeting with AVC Executive
- Ron Scrimgeour to liaise with HMCIP re annual training
- HMCIP to reflect on proposal re formal collaboration

The Executive members were of the opinion that the meeting with Dr McLellan and Mr McCaig was of great value and that the benefits of annual meeting and HMCIP input into AVC training would be incalculable.

AVC ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2006

The Annual Conference for 2006 was held at the Apex City Hotel, Dundee on Friday 29 September 2006. The theme for the Conference was "Reducing Reoffending: Supporting Offenders and Families"

A total of 64 delegates attended the Conference with 48 delegates attending the official Dinner. Although this was a slight reduction in numbers from previous Conferences, those attending found the content very illuminating and the venue very hospitable.

Subjects addressed included

"Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group";
"Parents Perspectives";
"First Offenders' Family Visits at Polmont YOI";
"Support schemes currently being undertaken"
"Drug Courts - Sheriff Brian Donald"

After Dinner, Sheriff Lindsay Foulis informed and entertained with a selection of anecdotes from his wide experience in the Courts.

Left to right - Neil Powrie - AVC Chairman, Sheriff Lindsay Foulis, Ian Smyth - Oban LPC and Keith Stirling - Low Moss VC.



The speakers, many of whom had travelled from outwith Scotland were all experts in their field and the Conference was more than appreciative of their time which was given voluntarily and also the passion with which they addressed their subjects.



Dr Andrew McLellan, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons chats to AVC Chairman Neil Powrie during a break at the conference

The Conference is an occasion when members of our Association are able to make contact with colleagues from other Visiting Committees and to exchange information and views as to how the varying prisons and legalised police cells operate. There is of course also an opportunity to discuss with other VC members in an informal setting some of the problems which arise when carrying out VC duties. New members in particular seem to find such contacts most valuable and enlightening.

Due to budget restrictions, few other Conferences were attended by our members which is indeed regrettable since it is only from the interchange of ideas that we are able to perform our duties with a wider knowledge of our role.

As this Report is being prepared, representations are being made to address this issue and it is hoped that the situation will resolve itself.

JIM SCOTT

Annual Conference Co-ordinator

In addition to the Association Conference, several members of the Association have welcomed the opportunity to attend conferences, including:

- Northern Ireland IMB Annual Conference – "Making a Difference" – Templepatrick, Northern Ireland 12 & 13 May 2006
- 4th Annual Youth Justice Conference – 22 June 2006
- IMB Annual Conference – "Monitoring Fairness and Respect for People in Custody" – Keele, 14-16 September 2006.

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY

Meeting with Dr Andrew Fraser, Director of Health and Care, SPS – 28.03.2006

Members of the AVC Executive Committee welcomed the opportunity to meet with Dr Andrew Fraser, Director of Health and Care, Scottish Prison Service, during which areas of significant concern to Visiting Committees were discussed. Issues discussed included the quality of food within SPS establishments; nurses' pay and conditions; the challenges of mandatory drug testing and the use of methadone.



Dr Andrew Fraser,
Director of Health
and Care, SPS

Meeting with Delegation from Bosnia and Herzegovina – 21.04.06

As part of a wider initiative, sponsored by the Council of Europe, to introduce non-governmental organisations into the Bosnia and Herzegovina prison system, members of the AVC Executive Committee were invited to address a delegation of senior visiting officials in April 2006. Areas covered in the presentation included a brief history of Visiting Committees, their role and duties, practical advice on carrying out a rota visit, and the importance of impartiality and independence.



ASSOCIATION OF VISITING COMMITTEES
FOR SCOTTISH PENAL ESTABLISHMENTS

Tripartite Meeting – 20 & 21 November 2006

Following the success of the inaugural Tripartite talks in Belfast in 2005, members of the Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB) of Northern Ireland, England and Wales, together with members of the AVC met at SPS College, Polmont on 20th and 21st November 2006. The purpose of the Tripartite Meeting was further to foster relations between sister organisations, discuss areas of mutual interest and concern and to share experiences of best practice, with the overall objective of improving performance and efficiency within IMBs and Visiting Committees (VCs).



During the 2-day event a series of formal and informal discussions were held, covering the following topics:

- The role of the secretariat
- Branding/corporate image
- Recruitment and retention of VC/IMB members
- Negotiating Service Level Agreements
- Rota Visits (including "shadow" rota visits at HMP & YOI Polmont and HMP Glenochil)

The talks concluded with an informal working lunch during which the many issues raised over the 2 days were summarised.

All three organisations agreed that the talks had been wide-ranging, in-depth and productive, and that the rota visits were greatly beneficial. The visits to HMP & YOI Polmont and HMP Glenochil afforded guests from Northern Ireland and England and Wales the opportunity to see first-hand the various initiatives within establishments and offered comparison with regimes and procedures within their own establishments.

It was further agreed that the outcome and benefits of the second Tripartite Talks would be subject to critical review to ensure that future meetings were both meaningful, relevant and beneficial, not just for those who attend but for IMBs and VCs as a whole.

Monitoring Reliance

The issue of monitoring the Reliance operation has been raised a number of times at meetings and conferences both by Visiting Committees and Independent Custody Visitors who monitor police cells.

The VC Review states on page 17 section 3.2.4

“In relation to prison escorts, VCs may take up a complaint from a prisoner relating to prison escorting. This would not create a requirement to “visit” a prisoner under escort but would give appropriate authority to enquire into escorting arrangements and to draw any issues to the attention of the Governor.”

Section 3.2.5 states further

“The review group noted that there was some uncertainty about where the responsibility rests for independent monitoring of holding cells at courts. Since these are not “penal establishments”, they do not fall within the remit of VCs. It was agreed that this matter be remitted to the Justice Department to raise with the appropriate authorities..”

A footnote on p17 states,

“Since the group last met, we have been advised by the Scottish Court Service HMICIP is intending to undertake inspection of these facilities.”

Andrew McLellan has indeed conducted an inspection of prisoners in transit and court cells. His report is ready for publication at a date to be agreed with the new Minister Mr Kenny McAskill.

Bruce Logan, Executive Member for VC concerns, and I raised the issue with Eric Murch, Director, Partnerships and Commissioning SPS, earlier this year and he made the point that the Reliance contract is a contract with SPS and therefore it is SPS who should monitor this contract.

Mr Murch assured us that the monitoring his team does is rigorous and goes beyond simply the financial aspects. Reliance is fined for failings in its service. Reliance also has its own complaints procedure and prisoners regularly use this when there is loss or damage to property.

It is clear therefore that VCs have no authority to check on conditions in Reliance vans, to travel in them or to look at court cells. VCs do have the right to ask prisoners about conditions they have experienced in transit and report issues to the Governor.



VC should ask for the Reliance service to be part of the Governor's Report and put on the agenda for VC meetings. Each prison has a contract-monitoring officer who collates complaints and issues about failures in Reliance service for

forwarding to SPS head office.

Although this may answer the specific question about our remit, several questions need to be asked in the wider context of safety, humanity and transparency. I have added some points below.

Given the huge number of journeys carried out by Reliance, is the monitoring carried out by SPS sufficient in its frequency, scale and scope?

An inspection of Court Cells is not the same as monitoring. The volume of prisoners and detainees using court cells and their temporary stay would imply that issues that they have are not likely to be brought to anyone's attention. Hospitals are not penal establishments and prisoners are located there from time to time. Who has responsibility for monitoring conditions here?

It may be that the Association would wish to take these forward under “prisoner issues”.

Ron J Scrimgeour
30 May 2007

Draft Training Programme 2007/08

Mid to late August

Awareness Half Day for Committee Clerks

Location: Stirling - Style: Informal, exchange of views, listening, sharing

Topics to include-

- Overview of Prison estate
- Role of the VC members
- Role of the Clerk
- Communications with AVC, Convenors, SPS, Committee Members
- Role of the Local Authorities and CJA

New Member/Refresher Training

Late August Early September

Location: Polmont - Style: Seminar, discussion groups

Topics to include-

- History of Prisons and Visiting Committees
- Overview of Prison Estate
- Role of the VC member
- Personal safety
- Going about a visit
- Communicating with prisoners
- Raising issues with prison staff

Advance Training

Late November early December

Location; Polmont - Style: seminar, discussion groups

Topics to include –

- Higher order communication skills
- Personal safety, hostage briefing
- Health and safety issues
- Psychology of imprisonment
- Human rights and legal issues
- Media
- Dealing with the wider community

Convenors Training Day

To be confirmed but January 2008 likely

Specialised training by SPS staff at Polmont

To be confirmed

This is a draft Training Programme and your views are actively encouraged.

TRAINING

The second training day of 2006 was held in Perth on 5 May and was attended by 35 VC members. Advertised as “New Member and Refresher Training” this session used the same format and materials as the Glasgow training session in March 2006. New members benefited from the contributions made by longer serving members and the lively discussion indicated where amendments and addition to the training programme could be made. Immediate past Convener of the Association, Mr Bob Shewan, attended and was fulsome in his praise of the professional content and delivery of the course material.

Scottish Prison Service College



Part of the plan for training was that production of training record templates to send to all Committee Clerks and to build up the training pack distributed to all Committees to use as a central resource locally. Unfortunately our funding and the fact that the preparation of material falls on the shoulders of volunteers has not allowed this. The Review, the absence of a ministerial implementation strategy and the phasing in of responsibilities for the Community Justice Authorities means that the current training programme will once again be self-help.

Training Co-ordinator, Ron Scrimgeour, extends grateful thanks to those who helped with the preparation and delivery of the material and those attending for their open-mindedness and enthusiasm for this essential aspect of VC work.

A comprehensive training programme is planned for 2007-8 and details will be distributed to all VCs via Clerks and Convenors.

Managing Change

The last year has seen many changes taking place across the prison estate. With the opening of new accommodation blocks and the closure of Low Moss prison staff and visiting committee members alike have had to adapt to the changing and expanding Service.

Friarton made the change from Adults to Young Offenders in February 2007 providing accommodation for 89 top end YOs. In the wake of that change, a new YOI VC had to be formed. This is now up and running and working well. Under the guidance of their experienced Chair, the Committee have taken their place in the Association.

The gaining of this new Committee was offset by the loss of Low Moss Visiting Committee. It is hoped that all this expertise will not be lost and that when the new prison is built some of the members may return to the ranks of Visiting Committee members.

Perth Prison's new C Hall is almost complete and due to come on stream at the end of 2007.

Glenochil's new block, Abercrombie Hall, opened along with a new Health Centre. The new Visits Room has a greatly enlarged capacity, not to mention stunning views of the Ochils.



Glenochil Visit Room with views of the Ochils



Edinburgh has its new Hall but the former top end Pentland Hall has been given over to mainstream prisoners and Kerr House at Shotts Prison now houses the top end regime which, along with Greenock's well-established Chrisswell House, will prepare prisoners for Open conditions and eventual release.



HMP Castle Huntly

Castle Huntly and Noranside Open Prisons which for some time past have been joined under one Governor as "The Open Estate" have 2 separate Visiting Committees. These will shortly disband and a new Open Estate Visiting Committee will be formed in its place.

Aberdeen and Peterhead Prisons still face uncertainty. Members of both Visiting Committee members will have to wait to see what their future role will be and it is hoped that the loss of committed VC members will be minimised as much as possible.



YOI Friarton

Polmont YOI has opened its new Monro Hall but, despite the opening of Friarton as a YOI they are still struggling with numbers as the prison population continues to grow.

It is to the credit of our members that they are ever willing to adapt and to learn as their prisons change with the times.



Kerr House visiting room

REVIEW OF VISITING COMMITTEES

Last year's report outlined the objectives of the Justice Minister's Review Group which was formed in May 2005.

At an Association meeting held in Glasgow on the 20th January 2006, Association members considered the recommendations and prepared a formal response to the Justice Minister, Cathy Jamieson.

At the time of publishing last year's report the Association still awaited a response from the Minister. After a gap of 14 months the Convener and Vice-Convener met with the Justice Minister on the 23rd March 2007 to discuss her response and on how to take the Review forward to implementation.

Sixteen recommendations were accepted for immediate implementation; five recommendations relating to operational matters were accepted in principle but dependent on the outcome of the Crerar Review (at time of writing still ongoing); seven recommendations (including the name change to Independent Monitoring Boards as in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) were rejected.

The Association met shortly afterwards and it was the general consensus that the task of implementation, particularly the many recommendations to be taken forward by the Association, was substantial and outwith the remit and scope of voluntary unpaid members. It was felt that the nature of the work involved required the appointment of a development officer to prepare a full implementation strategy. The Association agreed to consult the secretariat of the Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB) of England and Wales to seek guidance on the preparation of an implementation strategy, job and person specification in order to take the Review forward.

The Association has also written to the new Justice Secretary, Kenny McAskill, seeking an early meeting to discuss the Review recommendations and the previous Minister's response. At the time of writing this report the Association awaits a response from the IMB Secretariat but now has a date to meet with Kenny McAskill, Justice Secretary.

The Association views with concern and regret that it took the Justice Department 14 months to respond to the Review Group's recommendations and the Association's response and that since the meeting between the then Justice Minister, Cathy Jamieson and the Association's Convener and Vice-Convener on 23 March 2007 the Association has heard nothing.

AVC Budget and Finance

Last year 2006-2007, the Association made a budget bid for £36,850, which reflected the spend for the previous year with a modest uplift for inflation. We received £28,675, a shortfall of £8,175. The Association ran out of money by December and the Convener and Vice-Convener met with senior SPS management to discuss the crisis.

They were well received and it was emphasised to them that all SPS budgets were under scrutiny and savings had to be made across the board. They were assured that funds would be made available to ensure that the Association could continue to function until the new financial year started in April 2007. They were also told that as funding was tight, assistance could be available in other ways. Accommodation was available at SPS College and the Association could meet there at no charge.

We took advantage of the offer and have had many meetings at Polmont since January. The accommodation is excellent and the location is central and easily accessible with ample car parking. The railway station is a short distance from the college.

At the end of March we looked carefully at the budget and made a bid for £33,100 which we felt was sensible and accurately reflected the projected spend for 2007-2008. We were allocated £27,241.25 which once again included the savings target set by SPS.

The offer of accommodation at SPS College has been successful and has certainly helped the Association funds. We have to look seriously at how we manage the budget and decisions have been made to cut down on some of the visits made in previous years. We are looking carefully at value for money and how each proposed meeting/visit can enhance the experience/training of the members of the Association.

Ian Smyth - Budget & Finance

ANNUAL REPORT '07

ASSOCIATION OF VISITING COMMITTEES
FOR SCOTTISH PENAL ESTABLISHMENTS

ASSOCIATION

We eagerly await the appointment of new members and the reappointment of experienced VC members after the Council elections of 2007. There is a period of 2 months grace where existing committees continue to carry out duties until the statutory meetings of Councils are held and appointments made.

In the past some Councils have taken more than 2 months to make appointments and this is not helpful. It is unfortunate that the long delay in publishing and accepting the findings of the Minister's Review prevented the implementation of so much good practice and unified the appointments under the new Community Justice Authorities.

MEET THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Association of Visiting Committees exists to help Visiting Committees and all VC members, through their own Committee, are members of the Association.

Any member having an issue to discuss is welcome to bring it to the Association via their own VC and to this end, for the first time in 2007, individual Executive Committee members have been given responsibility for various aspects of AVC work.

The Executive Committee members are shown below, along with their area of responsibility. We are here to help you – if you see us at a Conference, Training Day or AGM, please do not hesitate to approach us. We will do all we can to help.

Training	RON SCRIMGEOUR Assn. Vice Convener	
VC Concerns	BRUCE LOGAN Convener, Edinburgh VC	
Visits	CHARLES HEBENTON MBE Convener, Shotts VC	
Conference	JIM SCOTT Convener, Cornton Vale YOI VC	
Annual Report & Publicity	ANNE FREEBAIRN Convener, Greenock VC	
Finance	IAN SMYTH Convener, Oban LPC	
Member Support	WILLIE CLARKE Convener, Glenochil VC	

Appendix I

Visiting Committee	Members
Aberdeen	8
Barlinnie	25
Castle Huntly	8
Cornton Vale Over 21	15
Cornton Vale Under 21	6
Dumfries	11
Edinburgh	17
Friarton YOI (opened Feb '07)	6
Glenochil	14
Greenock	8
Inverness	10
Kilmarnock	15
Low Moss	10
Noranside	8
Perth	9
Peterhead	8
Polmont YOI	16
Shotts	17
Total	221

Legalised Police Cells	Members
Campbeltown	3
Dunoon	3
Hawick	3
Lerwick	3
Lochmaddy	3
Oban	3
Orkney	3
Thurso	3
Stornoway	3
Total	27
Grand Total	248