

ABERDEEN PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE -

ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2014

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Section 1: Statutory Role of the Visiting Committee

The statutory responsibilities of Visiting Committees (VCs) and of their members are set out in Part 17 of The Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 2011 made under Section 8(2) of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989 (c.45). That states:

"Rules made under section 39 of this Act shall prescribe the functions of visiting committees, and shall among other things require the members to pay frequent visits to the prison and hear any complaints which may be made by the prisoners and report to [Scottish Ministers] any matter which they consider it expedient to report; any member of a visiting committee may at any time enter the prison and shall have free access to every part thereof and to every prisoner".

A Visiting Committee is specifically charged to:-

General duties of Visiting Committees and Members of Committees

A visiting committee must:-

- (149)(1) co-operate with the Scottish Ministers and the Governor of the relevant prison in promoting the efficiency of the prison, and inquire into and report upon any matter at the request of the Scottish Ministers;
- (2)
 - (a) immediately bring to the notice of the Governor any circumstances relating to the administration of the prison or the condition of any prisoner which appear to it to be expedient to report for the Governor's consideration; and
 - (b) bring such circumstances to the notice of the Scottish Ministers if it appears to the committee that the Governor has not remedied any matter which the Committee has notified to the Governor in terms of subparagraph (a) within such period as appears to the committee to be reasonable
- (3) from time to time inquire into the state of the prison remises and must:-
 - (a) inspect, in particular, the food and drink provided to prisoners; and
 - (b) in relation to any such inquiry
 - (i) record particulars of every visit made, together with any deficiencies found during such visits, in the committee's minute book; and
 - (ii) promptly send a copy of such particulars to the Scottish Ministers and to the Governor
- (4) discharge such other duties as the Scottish Ministers may from time to time assign to it
- (5) not disclose any information mentioned in paragraph (6) which the person holds or has held as a member
- (6) The information referred to in paragraph (5) is any information obtained:-
 - (a) by any member of a visiting committee which relates to the prison, any officer of the prison or any prisoner; and
 - (b) on terms or in circumstances requiring it to be held in confidence.

- (7) Paragraph (5) does not apply to any disclosure of information mentioned in paragraph (6) made to any person, or for any purpose, permitted by the provisions of this Part

Investigation of complaints

- (150)(1) The visiting committee or any member of the committee must hear and investigate any complaint which a prisoner makes to the committee or to the member
- (2) Where a member of the visiting committee wishes to see any prisoner in connection with a complaint, the Governor must make arrangements for the member to do so, whether in the prisoner's cell or room or in some other part of the prison, but in any case outwith the sight and hearing of an officer unless either party requests otherwise.
- (3) The visiting committee must
- (a) record particulars of its findings in relation to its investigation of a prisoner's complaint in its minute book;
 - (b) promptly send a copy of such findings to the Scottish Ministers and to the Governor of the relevant prison; and
 - (c) inform the prisoner concerned of its findings.

Visits to Prisons by Members of Visiting Committees

- (151)(1) At least two members of the visiting committee for a prison must visit the prison at least fortnightly;
- (2) In complying with paragraph (1), visiting committees must ensure that, in every fortnight, at least:-
- (a) one member visits the prison weekly, or
 - (b) two members visit the prison together in that fortnight;
- (3) For the purposes of this rule, the visiting committee must arrange a rota of visits to the prison.

Inspection of Prison Records

- (152)(1) The visiting committee for a prison, or any member of the visiting committee, may
- inspect prison records other than:-
- (a) personnel records;
 - (b) prisoners' records; and
 - (c) security manuals or other papers which have implications for security;
- (2) The visiting committee must record particulars of any inspection of prison records in its minute book.

Annual Report

- (153)(1) The visiting committee for a prison must make an annual report for the period of twelve months ending on 31st March each year to the Scottish Ministers concerning the state of the prison and its administration and may include in the report any advice and suggestions it considers appropriate;

- (2) The visiting committee's annual report must be delivered to the Scottish Ministers as soon as possible after 31 March in each year.

Section 2: Description of the Prison

The Governor in charge of HMP Aberdeen is Audrey Mooney.

Aberdeen is the local prison for the north-east of Scotland and the Northern Isles. The prison accommodates all remand prisoners and male adults serving sentences of up to four years. Other prisoners out with these classifications received from court are housed and prepared for onward movement to appropriate establishments, although some prisoners are held out of classification where this meets the operational needs of the SPS. There is also a small Female Community Integration Unit that houses suitably risk assessed female prisoners from the local area to aid them linking back into the community for release.

HMP Aberdeen has a design capacity of 155 as from May 2012.

The prison closed on 10 January 2014.

2.1 Prison Population

Accommodation	Capacity	Prior to Closure on 10 January 2014
A Hall	99 cells	No records available
B Hall	30 cells	No records available
Community Integration Unit	6 cells	No records available

2.2 Residential Accommodation

There were four accommodation areas: 'A' hall, 'B' hall, a Segregation Unit, and a female Community Integration Unit. 'A' hall had three floors which had 99 cells and four dormitories. The hall contained adult convicted, adult remand, under 21 convicted and under 21 remand prisoners.

'B' hall had three floors which had 29 cells each, two anti-ligature rooms, a three bed dormitory and two four bed dormitories. It contained admissions on the ground floor and both convicted and prisoners on recall on floors two and three.

The Community Integration Unit, reopened in June 2010 and could hold eight female prisoners. The Unit focused on eligible low-supervision inmates approaching the end of their sentences. To qualify, the women must have lived locally to the prison, have a maximum of one year remaining to serve and be suitable for unsupervised community access.

Section 3: Areas of the Prison Regime to be reported on

3.1 Health Care and Mental Health

Prison admissions were seen within 24 hours by the contracted GPs, following initial assessment by nursing staff. Nursing staff continued to triage patients on a daily basis, ensuring prescription or referral to appropriate personnel staffing issues. The establishment continued to accommodate visitors i.e. student nurses who were able to shadow for a day to gain some insight into the role of health care in this environment. The prison also supported a medical student who wished to conduct research into substance misusing patients who were sentenced. Such examples of partnership working was praised by Members and recommended for continuation at HMP Grampian.

Throughout the reporting period the Visiting Committee highlighted its concern regarding delivery of health care services and sought regular updates in this regard from the Governor. The Committee noted with concern that at the date of its final meeting on 20 November 2013, the Governor had reported the delivery of health care as being at a critical stage with the bare minimum of service being provided at this time. Although, the Committee appreciated that the Governor and her staff were doing everything they could to resolve the problems and noted that concerns had been raised with the Chief Operating Officer in NHS Grampian, they continued to highlight the negative impact this matter had on prisoners in the foremost, but also on prison officers, Members also highlighted their concern that the issues with service delivery by NHS Grampian had continued over many months without any suitable resolution and emphasised that this was not a position that could continue.

Given their ongoing concerns, the Committee welcomed the Chief Inspector of Prisons Scotland request for a formal inspection of the health care services within the prison to be undertaken due to his concerns raised during his visit of the prison in April 2013. In accordance with this, an inspection was undertaken by Health Improvement Scotland. The Committee, as well as the Governor, saw this as a positive step as the prison prepared for the move to HMP Grampian. Reviewing health care provision at this time would give the prison an excellent opportunity to explore best practice and address any areas highlighted. At the time of the Committee disbanding the prison was still awaiting the formal outcome of the inspection by Health Improvement Scotland, however the VC hoped that the issues would be resolved prior to the opening of the new establishment.

With regards staffing, the VC noted that the health care team continued to report vacancies over the reporting period and that this had led to some of the concerns referred to above. At the end of the period the staffing of the health care team remained an issue which was impacting on the prison's ability to deliver its regime on time. The VC noted that NHS Grampian was continually trying to address the staffing issue but that it was experiencing ongoing difficulties in doing so. Most notably, at the end of the reporting period the Governor was unable to provide a full report on health care delivery due to staff being on long term sickness absence. This situation was of great concern to the Visiting Committee.

No records available to confirm staffing compliment.

Following the VC's concerns in the last reporting period regarding the deregistration of prisoners, the VC welcomed the prison's partnership working with NHS community staff

to ensure a holistic care package was in place for patients from admission to liberation, to enable continuity.

Despite the staffing crisis, it was recognised that staff remained motivated and keen to deliver. However, regardless of this motivation, the VC noted that there remained concerns regarding a lack of awareness and skills needed by nursing staff to work with the complex issues prisons bring.

Community Integration Unit prisoners continued to register at Torry and any emergencies continued to be dealt with by the health care team.

Optometry services continued with additional ad hoc clinics as appropriate. Dental treatment had been increased to two times a week due to demand, this was provided by NHS and noted as a welcome improvement from the VCs perspective.

3.1.1 Support/Advice Services

Since the loss of funding for alcohol support for 16-25 year old in the last reporting period, the health care team continued to refer any appropriate patients to the Integrated Alcohol Service. The prison also continued to hold weekly addiction meetings. The VC noted with concern the staffing position and the impact on the addiction support available.

Smoking cessation was more evident with the support of one of the nurses who works in conjunction with Phoenix Futures, however this was a costly service at a charge of £10 per patient per week. The Committee continued to highlight the disparity in charging policy for this service as in community this service was free.

Clinics currently being conducted by NHS colleagues and nurses were BBV (Blood Borne Viruses)/Sexual Health/Diabetes/Learning Disability. A Keep Well clinic had yet to be implemented due to staffing issues.

The Committee has had a keen interest over the year in the support and advice services delivered both internally by the prison and also by external organisations. The Committee supported the role of external partners in supporting prisons both during their time in prison, but also on preparing for release. VC Members continued to promote partnership working for the benefit of prisoners and looked forward to further progress in this area in HMP Grampian.

3.1.2 ACT 2 CARE

Over the reporting period we are unable to confirm the number of prisoners on ACT due to no records available.

ACT 2 Care remained a priority for Aberdeen with no suicides over the reporting year. The VC commended the prison on their efforts in this area. Most notably, during the period, an audit of the process was conducted by SPS headquarters and HMP Aberdeen was given 'Reasonable Assurance' for the Act to Care strategy and adherence to policy. This was an improved rating for the prison rising from 'Limited Assurance' in a previous audit. The VC congratulated the prison on this improvement. Members also noted the action plan put in place to address points raised during the Act to Care audit has been completed. In addition, manager awareness sessions had been

facilitated to improve the core knowledge and afford guidance to the managers who oversaw the Act to Care process. This had proved successful and managers were now more confident when inputting into the Act document.

All individuals placed on ACT2CARE were given an "Immediate Care Plan" if a case conference could not be held at the time (for example Nightshift). A pre case conference health care assessment should be carried out by a mental health trained nurse between the period of being placed on ACT and being seen by the prison doctor or first case conference.

All individuals placed on high risk must be seen by the prison doctor prior to the first case conference or if their risk condition was changed from low to high. Prisoners were always encouraged to attend their case conference; if they decided not to attend the Chair of the case conference would speak with him/her to find out why they don't want to attend. The Chair would then always speak after the case conference to the individual to tell them of the outcome of the case conference. Prisoners families were encouraged to attend where appropriate case conferences. The VC supported this procedure.

3.1.3 Medication

Throughout the year, VC members received updates from the Governor on the procedure for the prescription of methadone to prisoners and noted that substance misuse patients were supported by clinical manager in charge meantime with support from Phoenix Futures. The VC further noted that the health care team continued to monitor and review those on prescribed medication to safeguard misuse/assess effects and any adverse reactions.

As above, the VC noted that methadone continued to be one of the treatments for those misusing illicit drugs, in order to reduce risk of drug related deaths. However they further noted that the prison was now prescribing suboxone and subutex to those that met criteria. The prison was also promoting Naloxone training for patients ensuring this medication was given to the patient's pre- liberation in an attempt to reduce drug related deaths. This approach was commended by the VC throughout the reporting period.

The VC raised concerns throughout the reporting period regarding the timing of medication and the impact this was having on prisoners, most notably intimidation and bullying. The Governor had assured the VC that this matter was being addressed with the timing of medication being reviewed. Members welcomed this assurance and emphasised the importance of this issue being resolved.

3.1.4 Mental Health

The prison continued to see an increase of patients with mental health needs. Psychology remained an unmet need for the establishment despite being identified by Mental Welfare Commission as a requirement. The team had little time whereby they sustained full complement of staff.

With regards the increase in the number of prisoners with mental health issues, Members sought clarification as to whether the increase had been as a result of

increased awareness and better recognition by prison officers. The Depute Governor advised that better awareness had contributed to some of the increase however this was not the sole reason. He explained that a multi-disciplinary approach was being taken to address this matter, with fortnightly meetings being held to ensure that the necessary support was available for prisoners. The VC commended the multi-disciplinary approach and hoped that this would assist both prisoners and prison staff.

Psychiatrists from the Blair Unit attended on a weekly basis to either conduct a clinic or mental health multi-disciplinary meeting which was chaired by Clinical Manager in Charge.

Mental health support was provided by a psychiatrist and also a psychologist. The psychiatrist attended the prison on a weekly basis to review the mental health case load. In addition, the prison had 1 mental health nurse. The prison also held a multi disciplinary mental health team meeting monthly.

Referrals were triaged immediately on receipt by the mental health team and sign posted to the appropriate service. Following the grave concerns the Visiting Committee had in relation to mental health assessments in the previous reporting period, this remained an area which they received regular updates on to ensure that the procedures were appropriate and working for both prisoners and prison staff.

3.1.5 Listener Scheme

A total of 4 listeners completed their training with the Samaritans in Aberdeen

The Scottish Prison Service views the Listener Scheme as” belonging to the Samaritans” and founded on the principal of prisoners helping prisoners. To that end all Listeners are Trained and afforded the essential Supervision of their work by the Samaritans.

This means in practice that whatever a Prisoner tells a Listener must remain Totally Confidential unless the Listener has the confirmed permission of the respective Prisoner for further disclosure.

The act of “creative listening”, a concept used by the Samaritans during their training sessions can encourage those people who feel helpless to help themselves, those who want advice to obtain better from within themselves.

3.2 Food

The VC makes regular visits to the kitchen. The catering department of HMP Aberdeen continued to provide nutritious choices and promote healthy lifestyle choices. Against a backdrop of high prisoner numbers and produce price increases, it was to the credit of the team that they had achieved this within existing budget allocation. This was highlighted by the HMCIPS who stated that ‘The quality, quantity, presentation and temperature of the food in HMP Aberdeen is some of the best experienced by the Inspectorate in the SPS.’ The Committee commended the prison on their continued approach to providing nutritious and healthy meals.

In addition to the above, the catering team continued to give the wider population a voice by facilitating “Food Focus Groups” quarterly with staff and prisoners and the creation of a new menu offering a more comprehensive range of choice to cater for all

dietary requirements. The Focus Group provided prisoners the opportunity to discuss and look at ways to improve menu content. These meetings played an important role in ensuring customers satisfaction.

At the last meeting of the Committee, members noted that the new winter menu had been successfully rolled out. In addition, the Committee welcomed the continuation of the prisoner food focus group and noted that there were no major concerns with the catering provision. Theme nights had been planned for the festive period. Members also welcomed the introduction of the themed menus to provide a variety to prisoners. Additional supplements were also to be added to the advertised menus during December. The suggestions of the population are considered and incorporated into catering provision when possible and appropriate. The VC commended this engagement with all prisoners and hoped that this would continue in HMP Grampian.

3.3 Equality and Diversity

The prison had a local equality and diversity team in place within the prison. It also had an equality and diversity manager who provided a link to assisting managers with any issues relating to equality and diversity. During the period there were no recorded racial or diversity incidents. The prison remained fully committed to supporting all aspects of its equality and diversity policies.

The Scottish Prison Service Lesbian, Gay and Bi Sexual Support Network visited the prison in the reporting period during which it highlighted the support available to staff employed in the SPS. This visit was well received and attended by staff. The VC commended the prison on its proactive approach and on the outcome of the visit.

3.4 Health and Safety

During the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 the prison witnessed an increase in the number of recorded accidents. This increase is attributed to improved recording and understanding of the accident reporting process. The prison also experienced a drop in the number of fire alarm activations during this period.

The VC noted that the prison continued to proactively promote health and safety. In addition a new updated Share Point site was in place and this development was welcomed by Members. The VC welcomed the prison's increased focus on health and safety, in particular highlighting the evident dividends accruing from this. Members commended the prison for this.

3.4 Education, Training and Work

As of 1 August 2013, education services were provided by Fife College (a merger of the former provider Carnegie College with Adam Smith College and part of Elmwood College). This did not affect the prison in anyway other than a change of logo. The VC noted that the college continued to provide a range of education opportunities suitable for the needs of the population. The emphasis of learning outwith the classroom was welcomed by the Visiting Committee and had proved to be positive with prisoners. In addition, greater partnership working between the college and other areas of the prison, such as the staff in the sport and fitness centre, laundry, kitchen etc had been developed in order to further promote learning outwith the classroom environment.

The Learning Centre continued to engage with prisoners producing positive results. These included certification and success with the recent Koestler Awards. The Centre offered classes in Communications, Numeracy, Maths, ICT, Art, a peer tutored guitar sessions, a specific ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) group and a Storybook Dads group. The Storybook Dads group enabled the prisoners to personalise and read a story which is then recorded on a disc and sent out to their child/children. This had been extremely popular and the VC welcomed the continuation of this session.

To improve and raise the Centre's profile and encourage learning out with the Centre, there were staff working in the kitchen and laundry work parties now helping the prisoners in these areas achieve SQA qualifications. The work completed was contextualised for their place of work. This allowed the prison to have success with students resulting in many achievements in SQA certification from SCQF level two to SCQF level 5 in a broad range of subjects and also College certificates showing achievement in short courses and progress. It was also noted that the total number of prisoners taking part in literacy/numeracy screening had risen year on year, and the total number of SQA certificates also continued to rise. To congratulate the prisoners on their achievements an awards ceremony was held and prisoners were able to invite family and friends to attend for the celebration. The VC commended the prisoners for their engagement with the Learning Centre and their resulting successes.

The VC also noted with delight that further partnership working had enabled the Learning Centre to have a close working relationship with Roots and Shoots group and Aberdeen Forward.

Details of courses are available in the Learning Centre for all prisoners. The Centre actively encouraged all learners to be the best they could be with a 'can do attitude' and this was an ethos applauded by the VC.

The Centre had introduced Total Prisoner Learning Hours (PLHs), this saw community learning staff working on a project within the prison in the hoped that this would encourage prisoners to continue to engage in a learning environment on release from prison.

Education was an area which the Committee raised various questions regarding throughout the year and sought continual reassurance that staff were doing all they can to engage with prisoners and to encourage them to participate. In addition, throughout the reporting period the VC raised concern regarding the provision of resources within the education centre and the impact a lack of resources will have. Members continued to request that this matter be investigated by the Governor and that a comparator study on the resources available in the education units of each prison be undertaken.

In this regard, the education centre manager, attended a meeting of the VC, where she provided an overview of the work ongoing in the education centre and advised of the progress achieved in relation to participation and qualifications.

The Visiting Committee welcomed the update, in particular the statistics on the number of prisoners attending the education unit and the outcomes achieved. Members welcomed the progress being achieved and the ethos of the centre and wished them well in its efforts to continue to increase participation. They asked a variety of questions

regarding the current courses available in the prison and the process for the continuation of courses when a prisoner is transferred to another establishment.

With regards the curriculum, it is explained that the centre is moving away from one size fits all learning to blended learning where prisoners will be gaining key literacy and numeracy skills through practical learning such as journey courses.

In addition, the Governor had investigated the Committee's concerns regarding the lack of resources in the education centre and reported back that there were no issues at that time. However, she had asked Carnegie College to ensure the deployment of resources and assured Members that the prison will continue to monitor the contract to ensure that the terms were being delivered. Members welcomed this assurance and advised that they had witnessed a more upbeat environment in the unit on visits from May 2013 onwards.

3.5 Links Centre

The Links Centre continued to provide prisoners with a range of opportunities to assist with the prison experience. The main focus had been on the induction and pre-release processes. Throughout the year they had facilitated quarterly employability days with service providers attending the establishment to provide information for prisoners to assist their reintegration back into the community. During these events several companies hold a workshop offering employment opportunities for prisoners who are due for liberation. RGU Law Society also attended on a regular basis to assist prisoners with compiling CV's and had facilitated job related interviews with prisoners to improve their employability prospects when liberated.

In addition to employability days, the Centre worked closely with the aforementioned organisations and now had timetabled sessions when these organisations will attend the prison to support prisoners.

The programme's team has also facilitated **18** prisoners through the Substance Related Offending Behavior Programme (SROBP) and Alcohol Awareness programmes. SROBP is a cognitive behavioural programme designed to address substance related offending. It can be delivered either in a group work format or on a 1:1 basis. It had also been designed so that it can be delivered in prison or in the community. The Alcohol Awareness programme allowed participants to explore their drinking habits, identify high-risk situations or patterns in their drinking which had caused problems in the past, then work through these problems using an effective problem solving process.

The Committee commended the partnership initiatives and the benefits these achieve for prisoners and welcome further progression in this area.

3.6 Roots and Shoots

The Roots and Shoots project was a lottery based initiative in partnership with Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen Forward, which offered prisoners with up to six months of their sentence left or on liberation, the chance to develop a work related routine and build up a work history that they could evidence when trying to gain employment.

Whilst in prison, the course followed mainly a horticultural theme with the group planting and growing vegetables and flowers and also learning about sustainability and recycling. Prisoners would also learn about their environment and how to plan and implement tasks.

Upon liberation individuals were given a work placement with Aberdeen Forward for up to six months, this was a paid work placement which they attended Monday to Friday. On placement their work followed a similar theme where they were developing an allotment and helping a community farm for individuals with learning disabilities. They also provided a recycling facility. Throughout the last year over 24 prisoners participated on the project with **12** working in the community and **12** within prison. **6** ex-offenders have gone on to source further full time employment when their period of six months employment had ceased in the community.

Members sought regular updates on the Roots and Shoots project, and were delighted with the positive outcomes achieved. The VC also sought assurance that successful community based projects such as Roots and Shoots and Adjust would be transferred to HMP Grampian. The Depute Governor advised that the HMP Grampian project team were in discussion with the various projects and that the Governor had been appointed as the community facing Governor for HMP Grampian to ensure such projects were retained. The Visiting Committee emphasised the importance of existing community links being retained and new links being established.

3.7 Adjust

The Adjust programme provided prisoners with a tailored package of supports upon release and relied on partnership working and close links with the community. The project was funded by the Robertson Trust, SPS, Aberdeen City Council and was in partnership with SHMU radio. Prisoners were identified for participation in the project through needs screening and in consultation with partner agencies. Once a prisoner is working with ADJUST they would be given support in areas relating to substance misuse, benefits, housing, work and education and also support with family relationships if required. Contact with individuals participating in the programme was maintained by an ADJUST co-ordinator in the prison, one in the community with the assistance of a support worker.

The numbers of individuals on the Adjust programme at the end of the reporting period is **18** in the community and **15** located within prison. Three in the community had also disengaged. As the programme had developed the more services had volunteered to support.

The VC received regular updates regarding the performance of Adjust. Members appreciated the work of the Adjust co-ordinators in increasing number of participants over the period and the success of the project.

With regards performance, the VC noted that the programme had been reviewed in 2013 and the VC awaited the outcome of the review. Unfortunately, the final report was not completed by to the establishment closing.

The VC welcomed the continued progress of the project and achievements made to date, whilst noting the challenges to be overcome, and the areas for future development. Members continued to advise the Governor that a number of prisoners

had intimated their desire to participate in the programme and asked that they were provided with details on the criteria for and capacity of Adjust.

3.6 Residential Accommodation

Unable to confirm average prison numbers due to no records available.

Throughout, the population remained diverse with adults, young offenders, untried, single and double protections all being managed through a well coordinated and varied regime where high numbers could test the staff and prisoners alike. The working relationship between prisoners and staff was key to the smooth running of the establishment, and the VC commended the staff for their excellent relationships staff foster with those in their care from the vulnerable to those who presented difficult situations for them to manage.

The VC noted their concern that the staffing complement within the prison remained short throughout the period, and praised staff for their hard work and commitment. Despite the staff shortages and high numbers the residential function remained very stable throughout the period with key decisions being taken on a daily basis to ensure that the operational running of the prison remained secure and this was to the staffs' credit. In addition, the VC welcomed initiatives to increase the staffing compliment for preparation for the move to HMP Grampian. This had enabled the prison to focus on its plan of getting back to basics in order to work more closely with prisoners by linking with external service providers etc. In line with the above, the prison had carried out a full review of regime and had made provision for B Hall to be further developed as an enhanced regime.

During the period, the VC noted that the staffing complement was beginning to improve with new employees from the HMP Grampian complement joining the prison to gain training in preparation for their roles in HMP Grampian, however the Committee noted the challenges this also brought to the establishment. As a result of the large amount of new promotions from C to D Band Residential, coupled with the very junior workforce in place, the prison has been working in tandem with Peterhead prison to temporary transfer some established officers to Aberdeen to provide stability to the regime and support the established Aberdeen staff in mentoring new promotions.

3.7 Community Integration Unit

The Community Integration Unit (CIU) could accommodate eight female prisoners and works with female offenders supporting transition from prison to community. The CIU provides places for eligible woman from the North East area to return to the area and allowed them to access support in the community prior to liberation. Females in the CIU were expected to shop, cook and budget for themselves and support was given to them in this area. They worked closely with Community Justice Social Worker and were each allocated a support worker from either Aberdeen City or Shire depending on their own home address. There were work placements that they attended in the community as well as support services, some of which were specifically for women. CIU offered women the chance to build their confidence and to put in place an effective achievable plan for their release. The unit continued to deliver ongoing support to all of the women located in the unit and continued to maintain excellent community partnership links.

The CIU numbers remained at approximately three/four during the course of the year. CIU staff maintains a proactive approach and attended both Cornton Vale and Edinburgh prisons on a monthly basis to speak to and interview prisoners with the purpose of identifying suitable candidates for the CIU. Staff from both Cornton Vale and Edinburgh has visited the CIU with the purpose of building relationships with CIU staff and witnessing the facilities available to future occupants from their establishments. Regular monthly meetings also took place between the CIU staff and Aberdeen City support workers to sustain positive working relationships.

The Committee noted that thanks to the hard effort and improved communication and partnership with other prisons in promoting the benefits of female prisoners transferring to the Aberdeen CIU as described above, the unit had been managed to ensure that the utilisation of the unit had increased from the previous reporting period. Despite the improvement, the Committee noted that accommodation of the unit had not been at capacity throughout the year, and on this basis continued to highlight the benefits of the unit being fully utilised, especially at a time when other prison establishments were over their designed capacity. In this regard the Committee had previously written to the Cabinet Minister to commend the opportunity for greater communication between establishments and transfer of female prisoners within the prison estate in order to alleviate pressures and utilise existing capacity within HMP Aberdeen. The VC had received a response from Mr Ironside, Deputy Director of Prisons, SPS, in this regard.

The unit continued to deliver ongoing support to all women located in the unit and maintained excellent community partnership links. The outcome of the women's commission of women offenders report has been published and the CIU had been praised for its multi agency approach in reintegrating offenders back into society. The Committee was encouraged by the outcome of the report from the Commission of Women Offenders on the prison's community integration unit (CIU); and noted that the Governor was committed to implementing the recommendations contained within the report.

At one stage in the reporting period, the VC raised particular concerns regarding the community integration unit and the level of engagement and interaction between staff and prisoners. In this regard, Members sought assurance from the Governor and asked for clarity regarding the regime in the unit and the level of purposeful activity available. In response, the Depute Governor advised that at present there were a number of newly arrived prisoners within the unit and that on arriving in the unit each prisoner had to go through a period of familiarisation. During that period the level of activity available is limited. However, he also highlighted that each prisoner within the unit had access to the same opportunities and that they had personal responsibility for their own level of engagement. In addition, there were a number of new staff based in the unit who were being trained. The VC noted the response and hoped to see increased engagement and activity on future visits.

The VC noted that CIU prisoners and staff had organised the "Great Craigie Bake Off", where many staff in the prison contributed baked goods to supply The MacMillan Cancer Research "World's Biggest Coffee Morning" and raised over £200. The VC congratulated prisoners and staff on this achievement. This achievement was also commended by Aberdeen City Council.

In preparation for the move to HMP Grampian, Members sought assurance that the remaining prisoners' regime would not be disrupted by the transfer to another prison

prior to the opening of HMP Grampian. In this regard, the VC noted that CIU staff had visited Cornton Vale to discuss a mobilisation plan for the transitional period between HMP Aberdeen closing and HMP Grampian opening. Following discussions it had been agreed that the three females within the unit at time of closure will transfer to Cornton Vale and that the regime for females at present will be mirrored there. Members welcomed this assurance of continuity of regime for the prisoners.

Finally, the VC commended the prison on holding an open night for CIU resident's families to attend the CIU with the opportunity to ask any questions. The evening was very positive and families were appreciative of the efforts of the CIU staff to keep them informed of developments.

3.8 Prison Estate and Administration

Throughout the year, the estates department had been working on a number of projects to support business improvement and to ensure that the prison was maintained over the period until the move to HMP Grampian. Essential work was carried out on the estate throughout the reporting period to ensure that it remained fit for purpose until closure. It was expected that the estates team would be a main part of the de-commissioning process.

Given the impending closure of the prison, Members have throughout the reporting year sought assurance that the prison's maintenance budget had not been reduced.

3.9 Formal Visit by HM Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

The Committee welcomed the report on the outcome of the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland (HMCIPS) formal visit of the prison between 17 and 19 April 2013.

Within the report the Chief Inspector advised that importantly, in June 2012, the population of the prison had reduced to 174 and, during the formal visit, is down to 169. This reduction in the prison population had completely changed conditions and the regime for prisoners. As a result of these changes, he concluded that all prisoners were now adequately housed and the dormitories were now closed. In addition, he acknowledged that access to purposeful activity had greatly improved, with those on protection now having access to suitable work-based activities.

Although facilities were basic, education services were sufficient for the needs of the prison and for individual prisoners. He was heartened to see that even activities such as physical training were related to the learning experience. Family access had greatly improved since the last inspection with the provision of a new and comfortable portacabin.

With regards purposeful activity, the Chief Inspector advised that he had witnessed a community-integrated approach to purposeful activities. For example, he highlighted the prison's 'Roots and Shoots' horticulture programme which is closely linked with the local authority and Aberdeen Forward, funded by the National Lottery. Similarly, the Adjust Programme, which was funded by the Robertson Trust. This project worked to assist those prisoners who take part in it get a job on release in to the community in horticulture or to go to college to become further qualified. The integrated working with the community, with the local authority and other agencies was a very positive way ahead and amongst the best practice that he had seen. He congratulated the Governor

on the hard work and vision to achieve this and very much hoped this work can be continued at HMP Grampian.

The report detailed recommendations and highlighted areas of good practice in relation to the following areas:

- Safety
- Decency, Humanity and Respect for Legal Rights
- Opportunity for Self-Improvement and Access to services and Activities

The report advised that the only area of particular concern is the provision of healthcare. The Chief Inspector is sufficiently worried about the situation that he arranged for an initial visit to assess the position, undertaken by his associate healthcare inspector from Healthcare Improvement Scotland. As a result of this, arrangements had been made to carry out a formal inspection of healthcare both at HMP Aberdeen and at HMP Peterhead. The VC welcomed this outcome of the visit, as this had been an area of unease for some time and despite the efforts of the Governor and VC Members healthcare service delivery remained an area of concern. At the time of the disbandment of the VC, the final report from Healthcare Improvement Scotland was awaited. The VC hoped that the findings of the inspection by Healthcare Improvement Scotland would ensure that such issues were not experienced at HMP Grampian.

Members were encouraged by the comments in relation to the prison establishment and regime and commended the Governor and her staff for the improvements made and the resulting better outcomes for prisoners.

Section 4: Other Areas Reported on

4.1 Visits

The VC noted that feedback from both visitors and staff was mainly positive throughout the reporting period. The VC commended the various improvements to visits which had been implemented over the reporting period. In particular, the VC welcomed the introduction of empty visiting spaces now being offered to each Hall the day before. This allowed improved access well above the legal requirement. This improvement was applauded by the VC, in particular the positive impact this had had on improving and maintaining family contact.

The prison had also introduced “family visit” sessions. These were scheduled sessions where prisoners could meet with their children in a more relaxed environment. This was a new initiative which again supported the outcome to keep families together and encourage a positive influence from the parents to children. The sessions had been very successful with positive feedback from families and prisoners. Extra visit sessions were provided as the closure date approached.

In addition, the visitors waiting area had undergone refurbishment, with new chairs, information displayed on television, new decoration and minor building work being undertaken. Feedback following the visitor waiting area refurbishment had been good, with visitors citing a more comfortable and welcoming environment. In addition partner agencies had visited and made contact with visitors offering support over a number of areas. Members welcomed this refurbishment and commitment to improve the experience for prisoners and their families regardless of the prison being due for closure.

A revised child protection policy had been introduced; this encouraged a more proactive approach to identify child welfare issues and greater partnership with family and child social workers in the community.

The ‘tea room/cafe’ based at St Fitticks Church continued to be a positive development. This had given visitors the opportunity to have a relaxing ‘break and use facilities’ prior to the visits sessions. CIU prisoners continued to support this venture by providing their skills to make tea, cook etc. The Committee was very grateful for the assistance and efforts made by the church to facilitate this worthwhile venture.

Throughout the period the VC emphasised the importance of families being kept informed of the arrangements for the transfer to HMP Grampian and the arrangements for visits in the new establishment. Members also sought assurance that transport options for visitors were being developed to ensure that it enabled the improvements implemented over the period to be continued in the new establishment. Members were concerned that if efficient and timely transport options to the new establishment were not available that this would have a negative impact on the goal to keep families together and encourage a positive influence and continued engagement throughout a prisoner’s sentence.

4.2 Security

The prison continued to develop and work in partnership with Police Scotland, the local community and its own staff to improve security and safety for all visitors and staff in the prison. The VC welcomed the sustained reduction in the number of perimeter breaches since the last reporting period which had been achieved as a result of strategies which both raised awareness and allowed proactive intervention. In addition, intelligence led operations continued to have success in deterring and disrupting subversive and illegal activities with a steady find of drugs and mobile telephones.

The VC thanked the Governor for the inclusion of detailed security statistics within the Governors report to the Committee. This provided members with a greater insight into the security challenges faced by the prison, as well as confirmation of the substantial improvement that had been made in this area.

4.3 Front of House

Due to being a closure sight no capital investment is made on the front of house over the reporting period. Access by prisoners' visitors was now more streamlined. Specifically, the VC noted that once a person was on the prisoners' booking system the process allowed reduced time spent being processed and admitted. Lockers were provided for safe storage of visitors belongings. A walk through metal detector has been installed and visitors were searched prior to admittance to reduce illicit items being introduced.

4.4 Tactical Dog Unit

The prison had two dedicated dog handlers based at HMP Aberdeen which had allowed a more robust approach to tackling illicit items being introduced into the establishment. This covered searching visitors, staff, vehicles, area searches and cell searches. Dogs and handlers provided a vital tool in supporting the governments drive Detect, Deter, Divert and Disrupt. High visibility external patrols had also raised the profile of the department within the local community. The deployment had been well received by visitors to the establishment.

4.5 Escort Contract

G4S continued to provide escorts servicing the Courts and external movements for HMP Aberdeen. Delivery had improved over the reporting period, however representatives from HMP Aberdeen, G4S and Court Services continued to work in partnership in an effort to maintain the service levels. The VC noted that improvements required throughout the period included reduced waiting times returning from court and consistent transfer arrangements. With the move to HMP Grampian approaching, plans were being developed for the mobilization of prisoners and property between sites.

4.6 Prisoner Award Scheme

The Visiting Committee welcomed the introduction of first prisoner award ceremonies and noted that the first ceremony is held on 19 September 2013 to which prisoners' families were invited to attend.

Section 5: The Work of the Visiting Committee

5.1 VC Membership, Rotas

Throughout the year the VC has maintained a full membership. No records available to confirm visits from VC committee.

Councillor Forsyth remained as Chairman and Councillor Dick as Vice Chair. In addition, to holding the position of Vice-Chair, Councillor Dick is also the Committee's training co-ordinator. The Committee express thanks to Councillor Dick for her work in this role and in particular for the training rota established for members and the updates provided at each meeting.

At the end of the last reporting period Duncan Stewart resigned from the Committee. This led to a vacancy for one external member which saw the appointment of Sandy Wallace, who had previously been a member of the Visiting Committee. The Committee were delighted to welcome back Sandy Wallace who brought a great deal of knowledge, enthusiasm and required skills to the position.

5.2 New Rotas

During the year the VC to ensure the new member is supported, changed its rota to match an experienced member with the new member. This worked well and provided new member and relatively newer members with advice and most importantly a sounding board for any queries they might have had regarding the position.

Regardless of the impending closure of the prison, the fulfilment of its rota visits is at the heart of its moral and legal purpose, and these visits had been conducted timeously and properly throughout the reporting period.

5.3 Training

The Committee continue to undertake all necessary training and have throughout the report period undertook Personal Boundaries training.

In addition, training remains a standing item for each meeting of the VC, and Councillor Dick as training co-ordinator provides an update on training requirements.

5.4 Visiting Committee Statistics

Visiting Committee Statistics	2013
Recommended complement of VC members (per Rule 155)	8
Number of VC members at start of reporting period	8
Number of VC members at end of reporting period	8
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	1
Number of VC members leaving within the reported period	1
Total number of VC committee meetings during reporting period	5
Average number of attendances at meetings during reporting period	5
Total number of visits to the prison	
Councillor Allan	3
Councillor Carr	2
Councillor Dick	4
Rosalyn Downes	4
Councillor Forsyth	4
Rae Ingham	5
Eileen Lawson	4
Sandy Wallace (appointed 27 June 2013)	2

Applications/Complaints Statistics

There were a range of complaints raised by the Committee about, most notably over the period these complaints have focussed on lack of information /communication on HMP Grampian, transfer to HMP Grampian, quality of education being delivered and the lack of resources especially in the art class, vulnerable prisoners access to library services, closed visits, cold food in A Hall, poor choice of items within the vending machines located in the visitors waiting room, lack of privacy at visits, astroturf not getting used, lack of facilities in the visit room, engagement and activity in the CIU, timing of medication dispensing, health care service delivery, access to the Roots and Shoots programme and other work schemes, protein not available in the gymnasium and vulnerable prisoners (sex offenders) being in the same visit room with mainstream prisoners who had children visiting them.

5.5 Scottish Government Consultation on Independent Monitoring of Prisons

The Visiting Committee, whilst noting the uncertainty regarding the future of VCs in light of the Government's proposal to disband Visiting Committees following the consultation and review by Professor Coyle on the Independent Monitoring of Prisons, continued to carry out all functions and to raise prisoners concerns with the appropriate body be that the Governor, the SPS, the Scottish Government or external organisations/agencies and will continue in this manner until a decision regarding the future is made by the Scottish Government.

Whilst having grave concerns regarding the Cabinet Secretary's initial proposals, the VC recognised that the current operation of Visiting Committees required modernisation and noted the outcome of the balanced review of these proposals by professor Coyle and the subsequent recommendations. The VC responded to the draft Public Services Reform (Prison Visiting Committees) (Scotland) Order 2014.

Should the decision be taken to disband Visiting Committees, Members agreed that it would be preferable for VC documents, both those retained in the prison and by the clerk, to be retained by the local City Archivist rather than nationally. The VC continued throughout the reporting period to seek clarification regarding the archiving of Prison Visiting Committee documents. The VC received confirmation by the SPS that it was for the individual VC to determine where the documents were archived. In this regard, Members agreed that the documents be transferred to Aberdeen City Archives.

5.6 Summary of issues brought to the VC

Throughout the reporting period a number of issues were brought to the attention of VC Members. The VC has visited the prison 15 times between 01-03-2013 and 10-01-2014. There is a range of complaints registered and these focussed on: several health care service delivery, particularly the regime for dispensing medication and the intimidation experienced by some prisoners as a result, transfer to other establishments, in particular anxiety about moving to HMP Grampian, food portion sizes and temperature, staff shortages and resulting operational difficulties, availability of activities and job opportunities, and lack of toys and refreshments in the visitor centre. All issues were raised and discussed with the Governor.

Members had raised a number of issues on behalf of prisoners, using the administrative arrangements in place in the establishment to pass on concerns from one rota visit to another, etc. Throughout the period members highlighted the positive comments from prisoners regarding prison staff and commended staff for their work with prisoners and the resulting reduction in prisoner complaints.

In addition, staffing shortages across the prison remained a concern for the Committee. The VC was equally concerned at the impact staffing shortages had on the prisoners, families, the operation of the prison and prison officers. Members also noted that in preparation for the move to HMP Grampian a number of newly appointed individuals were working within the establishment to gain experience prior to the opening of HMP Grampian and that this brought challenges for the prison.

The VC also raised, with concern, throughout the period the lack of prisoner and staff awareness of the Visiting Committee and its remit. The VC regularly asked the Governor to address this situation and to ensure that information on the VC was readily available for all and included as part of the induction process.

5.7 Establishment of SASO

As reported in the VC's last annual report, the Committee, noting that they did not have any influence or authority for sentencing policy, agreed that it is an area of ongoing concern and that it will be useful for a local branch of The Scottish Association for the Study of Offending (SASO) to be established, and that this be pursued by the Committee, the Governor and Aberdeen City Council's Director of Social Care and Wellbeing.

With regards the establishment of a local branch of the Scottish Association for the Study of Offending Establishment (SASO), the VC had written to various organisations seeking their support for the establishment of a local branch. In this regard, the VC requested that the national association take forward the establishment in light of the interest and willingness of organisations to be involved. The VC was now delighted that the inaugural meeting of the new branch had been held and wished it well in its future endeavours.

5.8 HMP Grampian

In November 2011, the SPS announced its intention to award a contract to Skanska Construction UK Limited to design and construct HMP Grampian in Peterhead. As reported in previous annual reports, the VC had numerous concerns regarding the loss of a prison Aberdeen in particular the impact of this on remand prisoners, and as such campaigned vigorously for the retention of a community prison in Aberdeen.

In light of the Government's commitment to HMP Grampian in its spending review in 2011, and also the SPS's announcement to award the contract, the Committee accepted that HMP Grampian would become a reality. The VC still felt that in years to come the loss of HMP Aberdeen would be regretted and criticised, but had taken the unanimous view that it could not afford to expend its energies in that direction.

Instead, the important thing was to accept that the Scottish Government wanted to make HMP Grampian a success, and believed that it could be a genuine community prison for the north-east of Scotland. The VC agreed that it could be a success too, whatever its former misgivings and reiterate that it would be a much greater success with goodwill than without it, because goodwill could release the organisational efforts which were surely fundamental in a situation where difficulties might exist.

The VC throughout the reporting period received reports on the progress of the establishment of HMP Grampian and had constructive discussions with members of the HMP Grampian project team in seeking assurance that arrangements for prisoner transfers, continuity of programmes, transportation for visitors etc were all in place. The VC welcomed the updates and wished the SPS well in the opening of the establishment in March 2014. A number of existing VC members had agreed to become members of the HMP Grampian Visiting Committee until a decision on the future of VCs had been made.

Section 6: Acknowledgments

The VC would like to thank the Governor, the Depute Governor, and all staff across the prison for their assistance and support throughout the year and wished them well in the transfer to HMP Grampian. Members also thanked all prisoners who have welcomed Members of the VC in and had been happy to share their experiences to the benefit of others.

The Visiting Committee commended the Governor for the good working relationship between the VC and the prison and wished to record their thanks for all her co-operation and hoped that the VC of HMP Grampian would have such a positive experience.

FRASER FORSYTH, Convener.