

**ABERDEEN PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE -
ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2013**

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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.

2.1 Prison Population

Accommodation	Capacity	As at 31 March 2013
A Hall	99 cells	Prison to populate
B Hall	30 cells	Prison to populate
Community Integration Unit	6 cells	Prison to populate

2.2 Residential Accommodation

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

'B' hall has three floors which have 29 cells each, two anti-ligature rooms, a three bed dormitory and two four bed dormitories. It contains 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 can hold eight female prisoners. The Unit focuses 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 are seen within 24 hours by the contracted GPs, following initial assessment by nursing staff. Nursing staff continue to triage patients on a daily basis, ensuring prescription or referral to appropriate personnel staffing issues. The transition has impacted on the nursing team but all attempt to ensure the patients are cared for as priority. The establishment continues to accommodate visitors i.e. student nurses who are able to shadow for a day to gain some insight into the role of healthcare in this environment. The prison also recently supported a medical student who wished to conduct research into substance misusing patients who were sentenced. Such examples of partnership working is praised by members and recommended for continuation.

The prison have had an influx of patients with mental health needs, two who were assessed at HMP Aberdeen following transfer but had not been identified by transferring prison as being unwell. These patients have been transferred and currently being cared for in forensic hospitals. Psychology is an unmet need for the establishment despite being identified by Mental Welfare Commission. The team has had little time whereby they have sustained full complement of staff. At present the prison has four nurses who are experienced; this includes the clinical manager in charge. One pharmacy assistant/ one bank nurse covering shifts full time/ two community nurses who are new to establishment/prison environment - one of whom is on secondment and the other on a short term contract.

Psychiatrists from The Blair Unit attend on a weekly basis to either conduct a clinic or mental health multi-disciplinary meeting which is chaired by Clinical Manager in Charge. Currently the Health Centre has a case load of 12 open cases.

The VC noted that staffing within the Health Care team continued to report vacancies over the reporting period, and the implications of this. At the end of the period the Health Care team had two vacancies, one mental health post that had not been filled despite four attempts at advertisement over a 15 month period. This post continues to be covered by a bank nurse/the addiction nurse and overseen by Clinical Manager in Charge.

In addition the VC noted that the Health Care team had no administrator for three months and that this had direct impact on nursing staff, particularly with change to vision and decommissioning. Prior to the previous administrator in post the prison had a period of eight months with no administration in post and this situation is of great concern to the VC.

Community Integration Unit prisoners continue to register at Torry practice but are under care of Health Care staff until this is completed. Any emergencies continue to be dealt with by the health care team.

Optometry services continue with additional ad hoc clinics as appropriate. Since the previous reporting period, dental treatment has been increased to two times a week due to demand, this is provided by NHS and noted as a welcome improvement from the VCs perspective.

Despite the concerns regarding vacancies within the Health Care team, the VC welcomed the transition of all aspects of healthcare for prisoners within the establishment to the NHS.

Further information on the VC's efforts in relation to mental health care can be found at section 3.1.4 of the report.

3.1.1 Support/Advice Services

Alcohol support for 16-25 year old patients unfortunately lost funding this year and this was a concern for the VC. To alleviate the impact of this, the Health Care team have been able to refer any appropriate patients to the Integrated Alcohol Service.

Also of concern to the VC was the position that the substance misuse nurse was now unable to attend weekly as previously due to resources. To reduce the impact of this, the prison continues to have weekly meeting and are planning to re-establish the Addiction Strategy meetings. In addition, due to the addiction nurse being off sick for an eight month period this was an additional area that the clinical manager in charge had to oversee as no other staff had experience. The VC noted with concern this position and continued to receive reports at each meeting on the staffing position and provision of support and advice services.

Smoking cessation is more evident with the support of one of the nurses who works in conjunction with Phoenix Futures, however this is a costly service at a charge of £10 per patient per week. The Committee noted the disparity in charging policy for this service as in community this service is free. The Health Care team have recently contacted Derek Petrie from Public Health to support smoking cessation and the VC await the outcome of this dialogue.

Clinics currently being conducted by NHS colleagues and nurses are BBV (Blood Borne Viruses)/Sexual Health/Diabetes/Learning Disability. A Keep Well clinic has 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 supports the role of external partners in supporting prisons both during their time in prison, but also on preparing for release. VC members will continue to promote partnership working for the benefit of prisoners and look forward to further progress in this area.

3.1.2 ACT 2 CARE

Over the reporting period there have been 57 prisoners placed on ACT. This is a combination of high and low risk. 30 have started as high risk with 27 being classed as low risk.

ACT to Care remains a priority for Aberdeen with no suicides over the reporting year. The VC commended the prison on their efforts in this area over the reporting period.

All individuals placed on ACT2CARE are given an "Immediate Care Plan" if a case conference cannot 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 is changed from low to high. Prisoners are always encouraged to attend their case conference; if they decide not to attend the Chair of the case conference will 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 are 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 are satisfied that the procedure has improved over the reporting period. The VC noted that the health care team continue to monitor and review those on prescribed medication to safeguard misuse/assess effects and any adverse reactions.

As above, the VC note that methadone continues 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 is now prescribing suboxone and subutex to those that meet criteria. Naloxone is provided by those who have conducted training.

3.1.4 Mental Health

Over the year, the Mental Health team has been reformed. Mental health support is provided by a psychiatrist and also a psychologist. The psychiatrist attends the prison on a weekly basis to review the mental health case load. In addition, the prison has two mental health nurses. The Prison also holds a Multi Disciplinary Mental Health Team Meeting monthly.

Referrals are triaged immediately on receipt by the Mental Health team and sign posted to the appropriate service. The VC noted that the prison had an influx of patients with mental health needs, two who were assessed at HMP Aberdeen following transfer but had not been identified by transferring prison as being unwell. These patients have been transferred and currently being cared for in forensic hospitals. Psychology is an unmet need for the establishment despite being identified by Mental Welfare Commission.

Specifically with regards metal health assessments of prisoners, the VC had grave concerns regarding this matter. This concern had risen as following visits to the prison when members had witnessed recently detained prisoners demonstrating mental health issues upon arrival and continued to be located in the prison. The VC were anxious about the impact this had on the prisoner(s), as well as prison officers, and sought assurances from the Governor that appropriate and timely mental health assessment of prisoners was being undertaken. At this time, they also sought clarification on the assessment process for individuals whilst in police custody and prior to their arrival at the prison.

In response to the concerns, the Governor assured members that mental health assessments were carried out in a timely manner by a psychiatrist from the NHS and

that prisoners were transferred to a mental health hospital if that was the appropriate course of action. However, she explained that she could not advise on the assessment procedures undertaken whilst in police custody.

The VC also received a briefing from Grampian Police regarding the process implemented by Grampian Police when an individual with suspected mental health illness was in Police custody.

Further to the above information, members re-iterated their concern regarding mental health assessment of prisoners and as such agreed to arrange a meeting with NHS Grampian, Grampian Police, and Aberdeen City Council to discuss this matter further.

This meeting was held on 30 July 2012 and a lengthy and productive discussion was had with all relevant parties. At that meeting it was agreed that in terms of progressing this matter, that NHS Grampian review the processes between Prison Health Medical referrals to Psychiatric services and then the onward referral to Forensic Psychiatry, and that they report back to the VC on the findings and with proposed ways in which the current procedure could be improved. Given that NHS Grampian had recently started managing all aspects of health care within the prison it was agreed that this review of mental health service provision was timely.

Subsequent to the meeting an extensive review of the current procedure for mental health assessment of individuals in custody was undertaken and reported to the VC. The review concluded that all parties were confident that the procedures and processes were in place provided appropriate assessment. Although it was recognised by all that this was an important issue however, this was not an exact science and therefore officers had to be dynamic in their approach. The VC also noted the legal procedure to be followed.

The VC welcomed the review and the outcome and requested to be kept apprised should any concerns regarding the mental health assessment of prisoners arise in the future.

3.1.5 Listener Scheme

A total of four listeners completed their training with the Samaritans in November 2012. Discussions have taken place with the Samaritans about having more listeners trained and this is scheduled to take place in June. In accordance with this it is intended that the prison start looking for candidates in early May, once initial interviews had been undertaken they would put the names forward to the Samaritans for their selection interviews which would be done in the latter half of May. The training would then take place over two weekends in June during a three week period giving prisoners the valuable service and support the Listener Scheme provides.

The VC commended the continuation of the Listener Scheme and welcomed the forthcoming recruitment/training process.

3.2 Food

The VC makes regular visits to the kitchen. The catering department of HMP Aberdeen continues to provide nutritious choices and promote healthy lifestyle choices. Against a

backdrop of high prisoner numbers and produce price increases, it is to the credit of the team that they have achieved this within existing budget allocation. The Committee commended the prison on their continued approach to providing nutritious and healthy meals.

In addition to the above, the catering team continues 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 department has also introduced a new three week menu which had been approved by the Healthy Living Awards group and these will commence on 15 April 2013. 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 look forward to receiving reports on the outcome of the Focus Groups.

Members also welcomed the introduction of the themed menus to provide a variety to prisoners and had sought assurance from the Governor that the prison's supply of halal products did not contain traces of non-halal meat.

3.3 Equality and Diversity

The prison has a local equality and diversity team in place within the prison. It also has an equality and diversity manager who provides a link to assisting managers with any issues relating to Equality and Diversity. A special Olympic event was held to highlight that disability in sport can be turned into a positive outcome. Prisoners were able to participate in wheelchair basketball and a number of other events. This allowed them to mirror and appreciate the restrictions having a disability can have on full participation. The VC applauded this event.

3.4 Education, Training and Work

Education services continue to be provided by Carnegie College. Transfer of this service from the previous provider had been of concern to the Committee and as such had sought assurances from the SPS, the EIS and from the Governor regarding the quality of the service to be provided to prisoners. The VC continues to emphasise the importance of education to prisoners and will continue to raise and seek to address any concerns which are brought to their attention.

The Committee welcomed the continued assurance from the Governor that the education service was working well and that the transition had been achieved with minimal disruption, and this had been to the credit of all learning centre staff. This position being supported by the VC receiving minimal complaints from prisoners regarding the service provided.

The Learning Centre has a long established team who continue to engage the learner producing positive results. These include certification and success with the recent Koestler Awards. The Centre currently offers classes in Communications, Numeracy, Maths, ICT, Art, a peer tutored guitar sessions, a specific ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) group and a new Storybook Dads group.

The Storybook Dads group enables the prisoners to personalise and read a story which is then recorded on a disc and sent out to their child/children. This has been extremely popular and the VC welcomed this additional ability.

Due to the high number of foreign nationals, the prison continue to have high levels of ESOL students attending the Learning Centre and are delighted to have introduced some SQA ESOL qualification.

To improve and raise the Centre's profile and encourage learning out with the Centre, there are staff working in the kitchen and laundry work parties now helping the prisoners in these areas achieve SQA qualifications. The work completed is contextualised for their place of work. This has allowed the prison to have had 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. 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. In addition to this they are also working with Aberdeen City Council Lifelong Learning on a project about the history of Craiginches.

At present there is not a high demand for Open Learning or Open University although this can be facilitated. Details of courses are available in the Learning Centre for all prisoners. The Centre actively encourages all learners to be the best they can be with a 'can do attitude' and this is an ethos applauded by the VC.

Further to a request from the Association of Visiting Committees, the Committee sought clarification on the policy for internet access for prisoners within HMP Aberdeen. The VC noted that at present prisoners did not have access to the internet and that remained current SPS policy. However, the education unit had contacted Carnegie College regarding the possibility of internet being used for education purposes only within the education unit with this access being on a restricted basis. Members highlighted the benefits of restricted internet access being made available to enable prisoners to complete online courses. In particular the benefit to prisoners who had been transferred to continue with a course which they had already commenced.

Towards the end of the reporting period the VC raised concern regarding the provision of resources within the education unit and the impact a lack of resources would have. Members requested 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. The VC awaits the findings of this investigation.

3.5 Links Centre

The Links Centre has continued to provide prisoners with a range of opportunities to assist with the prison experience. The main focus has been on the induction and prerelease processes, both of which are being reviewed. Throughout the year they have 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 attend on a regular basis to assist prisoners with compiling CV's and have facilitated job related interviews with prisoners to improve their employability prospects when liberated.

The Links Centre has also formed close relationships with the Roots and Shoots project. The Roots and Shoots project is a lottery based initiative which offers prisoners the opportunity of paid employment in the community for six months. Whilst in custody they will work on the project covering various topics such as budgeting, life skills and cooking to prepare them to fulfill a lifestyle which incorporates employment upon release. Throughout the last year over twenty five prisoners has participated on the project with five working in the community and five within prison at present. Five ex-offenders have gone on to source further full time employment when their period of six months employment has ceased in the community.

The programme's team has also facilitated 40 prisoners through the Substance Related Offending Behavior Programme (SROBP) and Alcohol Awareness programs. 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 has also been designed so that it can be delivered in prison or in the community. The Alcohol Awareness programme is allows participants to explore their drinking habits, identify high-risk situations or patterns in their drinking which have 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 Adjust

The Adjust programme is a fantastic opportunity for prisoners and has continued to grow and develop throughout the last twelve months. The new Chief Executive has highlighted the Adjust model and similar projects are now being rolled out within HMP Greenock and Low Moss. Graeme Young has fulfilled the role as SPS coordinator and Michelle Harrow has been employed as community support worker/administrator and Graeme commenced role as community based coordinator in November 2012. The VC was pleased that the SPS had agreed to fund this second co-ordinator post and that this had therefore released money for the project to utilise. New premises have been resourced as a hub in the community for the adjust team which opened in February 2013 and is located within the Apex building in Union Street in Aberdeen.

The numbers of individuals on the Adjust programme at present is twenty two with ten in the community and twelve still located within prison. Of those located within prison eight are held in Aberdeen and four in Peterhead. As the programme has developed the more services have volunteered to support including Families Outside who are currently working with a family to assist with community reintegration regarding their son.

The VC welcomed Mr Graeme Young, to the post of Adjust co-ordinator and recognised his contribution to the success of the project. The VC appreciated the work of the Adjust co-ordinator in increasing number of participants over the period and the success of the project and as such supported the appointment of another co-ordinator.

With regards performance, the VC noted that the administrator is currently implementing systems to collate data on the individual's journey from prison into the community. Therefore any areas of need highlighted can be rectified in the future. At present the emphasis is on transferring information from the prison and SHMU radio systems to the new adjust hub whilst ensuring information sharing protocols are fully

considered. The VC looked forward to receiving the performance data in due course and would continue to receive an update on the Adjust programme at each meeting.

Given the success of Adjust, the VC supported Station House Media Unit (SHMU) and the prison's application for funding to the Reducing Re-offending Change Fund to enhance the Adjust project for short term male offenders from Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire currently centred around HMP Aberdeen and HMP Peterhead. The bid proposed to work with all Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire males from 16 – 25 years of age who were frequently in custody by means of a mentor who would assist them up to two years after release.

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 have advised the Governor that a number of prisoners had intimated their desire to participate in the programme and were provided with details on the criteria for and capacity of Adjust.

3.6 Residential Accommodation

The prison numbers have averaged at 178 for the year, over the contracted number of places of 155. During the period numbers peaked at 254 in April 2012.

Throughout, the population remains diverse with adults, young offenders, untried, single and double protections all being managed through a well coordinated and varied regime where high numbers can test the staff and prisoners alike. The working relationship between prisoners and staff is 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 present difficult situations for us to manage.

The change in population at HMP Peterhead has been a welcome support to Aberdeen. This has resulted in a drop in population within Aberdeen as any convicted prisoner serving over three months but less than four years, are now allocated HMP Peterhead accordingly. The successful mobilisation plan which resulted in over 100 prisoners being transferred from Aberdeen to Peterhead in May 2012 within a week was indeed a challenge but was facilitated without any major incidents or concerns.

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 complement for preparation for the move to HMP Grampian, as well as the reduction in prisoner numbers as a result of the mobilisation project. 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.

Towards the end of 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. 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 can accommodate eight female prisoners and works with female offenders supporting transition from prison to community. The unit continues to deliver ongoing support to all of the women located in the unit and continues to maintain excellent community partnership links.

The CIU numbers have remained at approximately three/four during the course of the year. Although during the course of the year a secondary criteria was implemented with the emphasis on increasing the numbers within the CIU, numbers have remained around the three/four mark. At present there are two prisoners within the CIU as one individual was recently released on Parole. The CIU has also recently introduced family bonding sessions which will enable occupants to build positive family relationships prior to being granted community access.

CIU staff maintains a proactive approach and attends 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 take place between the CIU staff and Aberdeen City support workers to sustain positive working relationships.

The Committee continue to press for the unit to be fully utilised; noted that accommodation of the unit has not been at capacity throughout the year, and highlighted their concern at this situation at a time when other prison establishments are 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 received a response from Mr Ironside, Deputy Director of Prisons, SPS, in this regard.

The VC continue to monitor the situation and note that the prison acknowledges that it has struggled for some time to get clients to work with, and therefore have amended the criteria for the Unit slightly to include ladies who have been granted HDC prior to their actual release date. This allows the females to begin the process of Community Integration and building family contact before being released into the community. The VC received updates on the unit at each meeting.

HMP Aberdeen CIU staff continues to have a proactive approach and spends time at both HMP Edinburgh and HMP Cornton Vale to identify potential clients and promote the value of the CIU.

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.

The VC commended CIU prisoners and staff for organising 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.

3.8 Prison Estate and Administration

Throughout the year, the estates department has been working on a number of projects to support business improvement. Work is being undertaken in the activities two area to develop a recycling centre for the prison which in turn will provide new work places for prisoners. The fitting of window grilles to all cell windows in an attempt to reduce prisoner’s ability to recover items that have been thrown over the prison perimeter wall has been completed. The VC noted that this has been a great success. Despite being a closure site essential work is still to be carried out on the estate to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

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.

Section 4: Other Areas Reported on

4.1 Visits

Feedback from both visitors and staff continues to be positive. In an effort to maximize the use of the facility the prison are exploring the possibility of lowering the afternoon sessions from four to three, but increasing their length. This has been progressed the weekday sessions to 3 x 40 min sessions which have been widely acknowledged as providing more quality time. Additional visit requests are now also well established, this enables prisoners' access to additional visits beyond their normal monthly allowance, and this allows further accessibility to family contact. The VC welcomed these developments and the positive impact both have for prisoners and their families.

In addition, the visitors waiting area has undergone refurbishment, with new chairs, information displayed on television, new decorations and minor building work being undertaken.

A revised child protection policy is now being applied; this encourages a more proactive approach to identify child welfare issues and greater partnership with family and child social workers in the community. Consideration is also being given to the use of family contact development officers being a point of contact for families. It is proposed that first offender families be given an induction interview by staff similar to what a prisoner would receive on admission. This would explain procedures and policies applied covering visiting entitlement, ppc, property etc.

With regards the visitors' centre, the VC raised the issue of availability and selection of food and beverages in the visiting centre, a topic which had been highlighted by prisoners during a recent visit, and asked whether this could be further expanded for families visiting. In response the Governor explained that families now had access to a vending machine in the waiting area prior to visiting, however advised that there were a number of security issues regarding the provision of food and beverages within the actual visiting area and that this would not be suitable at this time in the current area.

The VC noted that in preparation for the move to HMP Grampian the prison throughout the reporting period had been relocating prisoners to HMP Peterhead and as such asked if the families of prisoners who had been relocated to HMP Peterhead were receiving assistance, if required, to travel to attend visits. The VC was advised that assistance for families undertaking visits continued to be processed via the central unit based in Birmingham. Members expressed their concern regarding this system, and agreed that assistance being available locally would be of greater assistance to families.

4.2 Security

The VC welcomed the ongoing measures taken to address security breaches, in particular: (1) the launch of the "Prison Watch" initiative on 25 April and the positive impact this had had on both raising awareness amongst the prisoner population and reducing reports of items breaching the perimeter walls as a result; and (2) the introduction of the Tactical Dog Unit in the prison, with four dogs and two handlers; this had been a welcome addition to resources and would provide improved searches for all prison staff and visitors.

The Committee noted that the new measures had resulted in a 93% drop in 'illegal items' breaching the perimeter security. The introduction of the Prison Watch Scheme was also a welcome addition as it improved the prison's community relations and involvement. Participation in the Torry Action Group also allowed a focus for the prison to interact with partner agencies working in the Torry area. These included Grampian Police, Grampian Fire and Rescue, Aberdeen City Wardens, Aberdeen City Council Youth Initiative and various housing associations.

4.3 Front of House

Due to being a closure sight no capital investment is being planned for the front of house. Access by prisoners' visitors is now more streamlined. Once a person is on the prisoners booking system the process allows reduced time spent being processed and admitted. Lockers are provided for safe storage of visitors belongings. A walk through metal detector has been installed and visitors are searched prior to admittance to reduce illicit items being introduced.

4.4 Tactical Dog Unit

The prison has two dedicated dog handlers based at HMP Aberdeen which has allowed a more robust approach to tackling illicit items being introduced into the establishment. This covers searching visitors, staff, vehicles, area searches and cell searches. Dogs and handlers have provided a vital tool in supporting the governments drive Detect, Deter, Divert and Disrupt. High visibility external patrols have also raised the profile of the department within the local community. To date the deployment has been well received by visitors to the establishment. The Committee welcomed this addition to the prison's resources and looked forward to continuing to receive updates regarding the impact of the tactical dog unit.

4.5 Escort Contract

G4S continue to provide escorts servicing the Courts and external movements for HMP Aberdeen. Whilst G4S continue to have difficulty filling staff shortages, delivery has improved over the last year. Representatives from HMP Aberdeen, G4S and Court Services continue to work in partnership in an effort to maintain the service levels. Areas of improvement include reduced waiting times returning from Court and consistent transfer arrangement.

4.6 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

The Committee noted that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland would be undertaking an inspection of the prison between 16-18 April and looked forward to the outcome of the inspection.

Section 5: The Work of the Visiting Committee

5.1 VC Membership, Rotas

Throughout the year the VC has maintained a full membership. Members recorded 42 visits to the prison.

Councillor Kiddie announced his intention to stand down from the VC after the local Government elections in May. The VC placed on record their thanks for all his hard work while in the chair and as a member before that and highlighted the many achievements that he had delivered during his service in working for all involved with the prison from prisoners, prisoners families and for staff across a number of areas. Councillor Kiddie was replaced as chairman by Cllr Forsyth while Cllr Dick remained 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.

Also, following the Local Government Elections in May the Committee welcomed Aberdeen City Council's appointment of Councillors Allan and Forsyth (previously an external member). This led to a vacancy for one external member which saw the appointment of Rae Ingham. The Committee were delighted to welcome Rae Ingham who brought a great deal of knowledge, enthusiasm and required skills to the position. The work of the Clerk in assisting the committee was recorded by the chair.

5.2 New Rotas

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

Regardless of issues such as the future of the prison, the fulfilment of its rota visits was 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 Protection Training a new improved training programme for all staff within the SPS which replaced the Anti-Hostage /Breakaway Techniques.

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	2011/2012
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	6
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the prison	42
Councillor Allan	4
Councillor Carr	4
Councillor Kiddie – resigned May	Nil
Councillor Dick	6
Rosalyn Downes	5
Fraser Forsyth/Councillor Forsyth	8
Rae Ingham	6
Eileen Lawson	5
Duncan Stewart	4

Applications/Complaints Statistics

There are a range of complaints raised by the Committee about, most notably over the period these complaints have focussed on missing watch, lack of information /communication on HMP Grampian, transfer to HMP Peterhead, standard of canteen products, lack of TV in dormitory, quality of education being delivered and the lack of resources especially in the art class, vulnerable prisoners access to library services, lack of complaints forms in the hall, exercise should be split into 2 x 30 minute sessions, closed visits, cold food in A Hall, lack of proper puddings ; too many yoghurts, access to a violence reduction programme, poor choice of items within the vending machines located in the visitors waiting room, access to the Roots and Shoots programme, protein not available in the gymnasium and vulnerable prisoners (sex offenders) being in the same visit room with mainstream prisoners who have 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 announcement following the consultation 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 would continue in this manner until a decision regarding the future was 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 await the Cabinet Secretary's response to Professor Coyle's review.

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. This matter had been raised with both Lewis MacDonald MSP and Annabel Goldie MSP who had submitted questions to the Cabinet Secretary regarding the future archiving of Prison Visiting Committee documents. Both concurred with the Visiting Committee's view that these documents should be retained by local archives rather than nationally.

5.6 Summary of issues brought to the VC

Some issues raised concerns for VC members. Examples are several applications about health and dental care waiting times, overcrowding, transfer to other establishments, food handling, staff shortages and resulting operational difficulties. All issues were raised and discussed with the Governor.

The VC has visited the prison 42 times between 01-03-2012 and 12-03-2013. There is a range of complaints registered and these focussed on: several applications about health and dental care waiting times, overcrowding, transfer to other establishments, food handling, staff shortages and resulting operational difficulties. 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 particular, prisoners had commented on the quality of the food provided.

5.6.1 Housing Provision and Partnership with External Agencies

The Visiting Committee raised concerns regarding the provision of appropriate accommodation for individuals on release, in particular females located in the Community Integration Unit.

On a visit of the prison, the matter of accommodation provision on release had been raised, most notably the anxiety prisoners faced prior to, and on release, due to the existing housing allocation procedure. Members expressed their concern that individuals were being released without appropriate accommodation being arranged, and emphasised the negative impact that no, or the wrong type of, accommodation could have on an individual on release. The Committee discussed the Aberdeen City Council's current housing allocation procedure and the services available from organisations such as Aberdeen Cyrenians.

In light of the above discussion on this matter the Convener: (a) met with Mr Paul Hannan, Homelessness Manager, Aberdeen City Council, to discuss the current housing allocation procedure; (b) held a meeting regarding the provision of benefits to individuals on release and to report back in this regard at the next meeting of the Visiting Committee; and (c) held a meeting with Rae Ingham (VC member), Aberdeen Cyrenians to discuss ways in which both organisations could work together to support individuals on release.

Subsequent to the above, the Council's prison housing protocol was reviewed and updated to ensure that all that could be done to assist those in prison who had housing

needs would be supported in advance of their liberation date. Members welcomed the updated protocol, however continued to emphasise the importance of members, as well as the prison, highlighting any areas of concern in the future regarding the protocol and in this regard had requested that the Governor monitor and review the effectiveness of the updated protocol and report back to the Committee.

Separately, the aforementioned meetings led to the establishment of a protocol for supporting prisoners on release by Aberdeen Cyrenians. The protocol provided guidance to prison officers and associated staff regarding the services which were currently available to assist prisoners to prepare for release and access services on or following liberation. Members welcomed the protocol and highlighted the benefits for prisoners on release from organisations working together locally.

In addition, staffing shortages across the prison remained a concern for the Committee. The VC were equally concerned at the impact staffing shortages had on the prisoners, families, the operation of the prison and prison officers. Members noted that during some visits prison officers were stretched and in particular raised concern about the level of activity in the independent living unit were raised. With regards the independent living unit, members noted that due to long term staff illness, the member of staff employed within the unit had had to be relocated to provide cover in the kitchen. Members expressed their concern at the current position in the unit and emphasised the importance of rehabilitation and activities being available. However, they also commended staff for their flexibility and commitment to the prison and the good progress they had achieved. The VC also noted that staff the move to HMP Grampian would also have an impact on staff and were reassured by the Governor that staff were being updated on the relocation and transfer policies were being developed.

All-in-all, the reporting period ended with the members looking forward to continued support from both the Governor and her staff and coping not only with difficulties like overcrowding but also the uncertainty caused by the closure decision. Inevitably, given the nature of running a major penal establishment, there were unavoidable problems, but the Committee had been struck over the entire year by the reassuring tone of the Governor's regular reports.

5.6.2 Sentencing Policy

As reported in the VC's last annual report, the Committee held a seminar on 23 March 2012. At the seminar the matter of sentencing policy was raised as a topic of concern. Further to the seminar the Committee discussed the issue, and noting that they did not have any influence or authority for sentencing policy, agreed that it was an area of ongoing concern and that it would 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.

Similarly, members raised the matter of extremely short sentences being served and the impact of this on both prisoners and the prison establishment. The VC discussed this issue extensively in particular the merits of alternatives to sentencing being utilised, and the resource implications for the prison of short sentences, some times of which were for seven days or less. The VC was assured that issue was being discussed, with a view to addressing this, by a range of organisations and agencies. Members also requested the Governor to progress the opportunity for Sheriffs to receive training

regarding alternatives to sentencing and the success of community based programmes such as Adjust and Roots and Shoots.

With regards the establishment of a local branch of the Scottish Association for the Study of Offending Establishment (SASO), the VC had written to the Sheriff Principal seeking permission to nominate newly appointed Sheriff to the Scottish Association as a potential member of a local SASO branch. Once a response had been received the VC intended on writing to the Association nominating the appropriate Sheriff, along with the Governor/Depute Governor and the Head of Adult Services, Aberdeen City Council, as members for a local branch of this Association.

5.6.3 De-registration of Patients

During the reporting period a main area of concern for the VC has been that of the recent changes to arrangements made for prisoners' General Practitioner (GP) registration under the new NHS health provision agreement. This change meant that from April 2012, all prisoners serving a sentence of more than six months were automatically removed from their registered GP practice and registered with the Prison Practice. Therefore, on release prisoners were now required to register with a GP themselves. The Visiting Committee was and continues to be concerned regarding the new healthcare arrangement, most notably that on release prisoners would now have a further matter to deal with at this already vulnerable time.

Members noted that from their experience a lack of treatment, medication and the heightened risk of overdose on release from prison would appear to be potentially a life-threatening situation. People in need of medication and treatment might be denied this and their health would suffer and examples of this had arisen already. In addition, members highlighted that arranging a GP could take some time and effort; that this might not be high on an individuals list of priorities after release; and during this time their health and lives might be at risk.

The Visiting Committee hoped that given their concerns changes could be made to the current policy so that either:- (a) prior to release the prison could arrange for people to be registered with a GP, or (b) dual registration could be put in place so that GPs would continue to have a complete medical record for their patients and there would be no gap in their healthcare.

In light of the above concerns, the Visiting Committee: (a) wrote to NHS Grampian regarding this matter; (b) requested the Governor to investigate the issues raised and discuss these with NHS Grampian; and (c) raised this with the local Alcohol and Drugs Partnership.

In response to the concerns, Dr Chris Provan, Clinical Lead Aberdeen CHP, NHS Grampian advised that the Committee's concerns had been raised with the NHS Grampian's Lead on Prison Health issues and ways to address the problem identified discussed. He further advised that these issues were currently under discussion nationally at both the Prison Medical Director Group and also the Prison Health Network.

The VC although welcoming the responses received to date, however continued to be made aware of issues regarding this new procedure and as such was continuing to raise concerns with the Governor and NHS Grampian as they are made aware of these.

5.6.4 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 has 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 have accepted that HMP Grampian will become a reality. The VC still feel that in years to come the loss of HMP Aberdeen will be regretted and criticised, but has taken the unanimous view that it cannot afford to expend its energies in that direction.

Instead, the important thing is to accept that the Scottish Government wants to make HMP Grampian a success, and believes that it can be a genuine community prison for the north-east of Scotland. The VC agree that it can be a success too, whatever its former misgivings and reiterate that it will be a much greater success with goodwill than without it, because goodwill can release the organisational efforts which are surely fundamental in a situation where difficulties may exist.

The VC will work with the Governor of HMP Aberdeen, the HMP Peterhead VC and any other body to ensure success of HMP Aberdeen moving forward.

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. Members also thanked all prisoners who have welcomed members of the VC in and have been happy to share their experiences to the benefit of others.

The Visiting Committee were delighted to congratulate Audrey Mooney who was awarded a MBE in the new years honours, in fitting tribute to all the hard work that the Governor has done the VC wished to acknowledge the good working relationship between the VC and the Prison and wished to record their thanks for all her co-operation.

FRASER FORSYTH, Convener.