



PERTH PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

1 APRIL 2013 – 31 MARCH 2014

This report was compiled by members of Perth Prison Visiting Committee 2014.

For further information, contact the Clerk to the Visiting Committee at Perth and Kinross Council: Gillian Taylor GATaylor@pkc.gov.uk or Yvonne Oliver YOliver@pkc.gov.uk

Statutory Role of the Visiting Committee

The statutory responsibilities of Visiting Committees and of their members are set out in Part 17 VISITING COMMITTEES (Rules 145 to 155) of The Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 2011 as amended. Section 8(2) of The Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989 (c.45) 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; and 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".

Some of the rules governing Visiting Committees are of a largely procedural nature relating to appointments, meetings, etc. but others spell out responsibilities which are central to the role of Visiting Committees, ie:

- they shall co-operate with Scottish Ministers and the Governor in promoting the efficiency of the prison;
- they shall inquire into and report to Scottish Ministers upon any matter into which they may ask them to inquire;
- they shall immediately bring to the attention of the Governor any circumstances pertaining to the administration of the prison or the condition of a prisoner when they consider this necessary;
- if the Governor has not remedied matters within a reasonable period of time, they shall bring the matter to the notice of Scottish Ministers;
- they shall, from time to time, inquire into the state of the prison premises and inspect the food and drink provided to the prisoners and if, at any time, they find these unsatisfactory they shall record any deficiencies in their minute book and send a copy to Scottish Ministers and the Governor;
- they shall hear and investigate any applications or complaints which prisoners may make to them and shall report their findings to the Governor and Scottish Ministers;
- not fewer than two members of a Visiting Committee shall visit the prison fortnightly;
- they may inspect prison records other than personal records; prisoners' records and security manuals or other papers which have implications for security and a note of their inspection shall be made in their minutes;
- they shall make annual reports for the period of 12 months ending on 31 March each year to Scottish Ministers about the state of the establishment and its administration and may include any advice and suggestions they consider appropriate.

Description of the Prison.

1. Perth Prison has three Residential Halls and has a design capacity of 633. As a snapshot, in October/November 2012, the prison population averaged at 618 while in December/January 2013, it was 649. The Prison accommodates all sentence lengths and security categories from low to high supervision and includes both remand and convicted adults. All three Halls accommodate prisoners in both single and double cells.
2. A Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) of 14 single cells is located away from the main Halls and accommodates those prisoners whom it is either not safe or appropriate to locate within the mainstream. This may be as a result of violent behaviour, serious breaches of prison rules or as protection. The SRU admission register indicated about 128 admissions to SRU over a period of four months. There has been a policy of zero tolerance in terms of unacceptable behaviour in the Halls. Prisoners are removed to SRU overnight for further investigation of incidents/assessment, with a decision made the next day about return to Hall or a 72hour SRU Order. Staff ratios were at a much higher level than in the Halls. Consequently, SRU staff felt that they were very safe. Such staff ratios also kept prisoners safe. A minimum of three officers were in attendance to deal with one prisoner for general movement within the SRU e.g. showering, exercise yard, visiting unit's bookcase. Only one cell door was open at any one time.
3. Exercise facilities for the prisoners are provided in the gymnasium which has a sports hall and cardiovascular room, an all-weather 5 a side football pitch and outside exercise areas. The Residential Halls provide facilities for playing snooker and table tennis. Dining tables in the communal areas can also be used during recreation areas for playing board games. Satellite gyms are in operation in C Hall with others soon to be installed in the other Halls.
4. Food is prepared in the central kitchen which is located separately from the main Halls in a purpose built facility located in the Regimes building. The food is transported to the Halls in heated containers and then transferred to purpose built pantries from which it is then served to the prisoners. All diets are catered for and, in line with Scottish Prison Service policy, healthy eating is the target. A successful food focus group operates and there all feedback is given due consideration. Any complaints to the VC about food tended to be about dietary issues.
5. A fully equipped laundry is located next to the kitchen and provides all laundry facilities for the entire prison.
6. The purpose-built Health Centre is located close to the Halls and provides primary care facilities as well as mental health, addictions, dental care and specialist clinics.
7. A purpose-built multi faith centre is located close to all Halls and provides Chaplaincy services for all faiths. Services of worship, meetings and classes

take place in the Centre though the Chaplains also undertake their pastoral duties throughout the prison.

8. A comprehensive programme of education is delivered within the Regimes building and is provided by Carnegie College (now Fife College). A library service is provided within this programme which is administered by Perth & Kinross Council.
9. The Regimes building is also the location for the delivery of work opportunities for prisoners including wood machining and the manufacture of timber products, catering, laundry, packaging and textile manufacture. There are also vocational training workshops in the form of bricklaying, plumbing, hairdressing, industrial cleaning, painting and decorating, waste management and a bike repair facility.
10. A Visitors' Centre for prisoners' relatives and friends is located outside the prison. It is funded by the Robertson Trust and is managed by Crossreach with support from the Prison's Chaplaincy team and Family Contact Development Officers.
11. The redevelopment programme was completed in 2010 with the construction of a new Gate and Visits facility, an estates and stores building and other security upgrading. Hall redevelopment: These new facilities ensure that the prison is in the best possible position to provide a full range of opportunities to enable prisoners to address their offending behaviour and to prepare for release within a secure, structured and purposeful setting.

Executive Summary

The end of 2013 saw an increase in the prison population mainly as a result of the closure of HMP Aberdeen and HMP Peterhead due to the impending opening of HMP Grampian in summer 2014. HMP Perth also accommodated 50-60 remand prisoners from HMP Aberdeen while the sex offenders currently in Perth were moved to HMP Glenochil and HMP Barlinnie. The Visiting Committee is of the view that the prison copes admirably with such change while continuing to minimise the impact on prisoners.

The Visiting Committee has functioned for a long period of time with a large number of vacancies. Following the resignation of Chairperson Chris Hind, Carol Bailey took up the position of Chair and has subsequently been replaced by Irene Morrison, with Bobby Mangto being appointed Vice-Chairperson.

Since the last report, there have been several changes in membership of the Visiting Committee. In summary, resignations were received from: C Hind, Councillor D Scott, S Brand, S Brown, S Sinclair, G Samson, D Robertson, S Powell, L Hendry and I Crofts: new members include: I Morrison, R Gillespie, C Glennie, J Hughes, H O'Neill, D May and S Maxwell. The committee values the continuation in office of G Jain, B Mangto and N Powrie over this period of flux. At this point in time, we have 8 vacancies – 2 in Perth and 6 in Dundee. In total, our membership should stand at 19.

All members of the VC have completed their training as required. The prison is very accommodating regarding this. Some training needs updating annually e.g. personal protection training (PPT). Fire training and Boundaries training have also been undertaken. New members, in addition, attended the AVC training day. On some meeting days, key members of prison/NHS staff attend to give a short presentation and answer questions. The VC is very appreciative of this as it helps them understand better how the prison operates.

Visits to the Prison

Over the period April 2013 – end of March 2014, there were 48 visits made to the prison by our members. All members visited on a rota basis to monitor conditions within the prison and to ensure all prisoners have access to a member of the Visiting Committee throughout the year. These visits are weekly with 2 members each rotation. In addition, members made visits at other times, sometimes on a follow-up basis to prisoner complaints, sometimes to visit and monitor particular parts of the prison and occasionally to attend an event run by the Learning Centre or by the Chaplaincy.

Meetings

Meetings of the Committee were held every two months in the Boardroom of the Prison. We are very grateful for the secretarial services of Yvonne Oliver who acts for the Clerk, Mrs G Taylor; both are employed by Perth & Kinross Council.

The Governor or his representative attended part of each meeting.

Written reports were provided on prisoner statistics, misconduct/indiscipline and general comments on prison matters. Reports were also provided by relevant managers on a range of services within the prison; Social Work, Learning Centre,

Chaplaincy, Estates Management, Operations and Health Centre. All matters within the reports were open to questions and comments from members with further information being given on the spot or at the following meeting.

There is a clear strategic plan for 2013 -15 and this can be accessed by the VC on Sharepoint.

The Visiting Committee also has raised many other issues with all levels of prison personnel throughout the year and is satisfied that these issues have been dealt with in the appropriate manner.

Members were also kept up to date with the work of the Association of Visiting Committees of which N Powrie is Chair. The Review of Visiting Committees is still ongoing and we still await its final outcome.

The Visiting Committee is grateful for all the assistance given to members during the year especially from the Governor, Deputy Governor, members of the Senior Management Team, all Officers and Administrative Staff for their courtesy and assistance. A special thanks to Governor's PA, Julie Sansford, for catering for our needs during our meetings.

Prison Area Report

Estates provide the VC with a regular report and, at the time of writing, projects included the following: regimes air conditioning installation, A&B halls – internal high level decoration, satellite gyms to be installed in A&B Halls. Sustainability is of high importance and the 2013 report shows the following: electricity consumption down 3% on baseline year, water consumption down 30% and waste sent to landfill down 32% on baseline year. This is all very commendable.

Halls:

Prison staff in all the Halls are very attentive and the atmosphere has been positive when VC members have visited. There have been no health and safety issues.

A Hall and B Hall

These halls are of older stock but continue to serve a purpose. They are generally in good condition and well maintained.

C Hall

This is the newest of the Halls with tables and chairs in the social areas and these are well used by the prisoners. All areas are clean and tidy.

Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU)

The SRU consists of 14 single cells and is located away from the main Halls and accommodates those prisoners whom it is either not safe or appropriate to locate within the mainstream. This may be as a result of violent behaviour or serious breaches of Prison Rules. The area has been, when visited by VC members, well run and calm but we are aware of the difficulties with some prisoners, particularly

those with mental health problems. In their work with such prisoners, the officers show commendable patience and understanding.

Prisoners' Reception Area

Staff in this area are always on hand to discuss any issues with VC members. Facilities are good and the introduction of the X ray machine is an asset to health and safety throughout the prison as it can detect if a prisoner has 'banked' drugs, mobile phones etc.

Chaplaincy

The purpose-built chaplaincy was completed in 2011 and is a peaceful place for prisoners to worship. The area includes a wudu for Muslim prisoners. At time of writing, mainstream services – Catholic Mass, Church of Scotland and Islamic Prayers – continue to have some support among the prisoners. Supportive visits to prisoners continue on a daily basis with conversations about bereavement, hopes and fears etc being discussed. Prisoners' Week is well supported. Prison Fellowship operates in Perth under the auspices of the Prison Chaplaincy team. They are a non-denominational Christian organisation with volunteers from all Christian backgrounds and traditions. Prison Fellowship Scotland runs an in-prison restorative justice course called the Sycamore Tree course, based on the story of Zacchaeus. It is a 5-6 week course which addresses the issues of victim awareness, the impact of crime and the responsibility to take restorative action. Our VC is genuinely interested in the work of the Prison Chaplaincy and support their events.

NHS Health Centre

This purpose-built area is regularly visited by members of the VC. The NHS and prison staff who work here are extremely helpful and knowledgeable. The facilities for care of prisoners are very good. Doctors and dentists cover appointments as required. Mr McGuinness, Service Manager, is always willing to answer our many and varied questions.

The VC is concerned about the number of prisoner complaints they have to deal with regarding medicinal issues since the NHS took over the service in the prison.

Regimes

All areas are regularly visited by VC members. Any issues tend to be minor and are quickly dealt with. Some highlights are as follows:

Textiles: a national contract is underway for special risk pillows. Towels, bedding and curtains continue to be made for some SPS sites.

There has been an ongoing issue here with overheating in this workshop. We have been advised by management that this is being addressed.

Woodwork: Currently there are ongoing national contracts for pallets, seated picnic sets and garden sheds.

ICP: Waste management: this area is continuing to progress especially with the addition of the Bike Shed which works with a local bike station to recycle and

refurbish bikes. The ICP area allows prisoners to obtain qualifications that hopefully will lead to employment outwith the prison. The VC note that all areas of the prison are very clean.

Links Centre: this area continues to provide an essential service to the prisoners with over 25 different staff from external agencies addressing individual needs. Projects/partnerships that assist with prisoner throughcare are well supported.

Physical Education: in recent months, the Football Fans in Training course has been undertaken by a number of prisoners and staff. Community Sports Leader award has also been delivered. Over 40s class proves popular with some 25 prisoners attending each session.

Learning Centre

A full written report is available at each VC meeting and our thanks go to Mr Cunningham, Learning Centre Manager, for this. There have been several developments in education. The movement between halls and the lower numbers of prisoners has an impact in that numbers in education are not as high as they have been. The number of ESOL classes has been increased and there has been emphasis on smaller groups and on foreign nationals. The curriculum is based on project/activity learning rather than discrete timetabling – in line with principles and practice of Curriculum for Excellence. Individual prisoners continue to do well in national competitions that involve mainly art or creative writing.

Catering

Food issues are not something that the VC members have to follow up very often. The catering manager, Mr Roxburgh, has led many exciting initiatives. These include: providing food at children and family visits, increased choice of meals for prisoners requiring Halal food as well as prisoners who are vegetarians. Feedback from prisoners, especially over Christmas period, has been very positive. VC members do sample the food and have had no cause for concern.

Visits area

All visits must be pre-booked by the prisoner who is allowed at least 2 hours of visits per month. On arrival at the prison, all visitors must provide photographic ID. Everyone entering the prison is scanned by walk-through metal detector for security purposes and may be searched in accordance with the Visit Rules. The Visits Room is spacious. There is a café service and there are activities such as games for children. There are 28 tables with 4 chairs at each spaced suitably so conversations at one table are not distracting at another table. Visits normally last between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The recent introduction of discrete children's visit from 16.30 – 17.30 has been welcomed. The introduction of dogs to help sniff out drugs has been a huge advantage in cutting down drugs finds in the prison. As a snapshot, in November 2013 there was only one drug find in the mail. There are two dog handlers and 4 dogs and the evidence so far is that they are extremely effective and this, in turn, has an impact on bullying and substance misuse in the prison.

Dog Unit

The VC very much welcomes the recent introduction of a dog unit consisting of two officers who will be responsible for two dogs each. This initiative will go a long way to assist in the reduction in the amount of drugs being brought into the prison via visitors. There is already evidence that many visitors when seeing the dogs at reception suddenly decide to forgo their visit.

Community Partnerships with schools

The VC is much impressed with the work that is being carried out to manage and deliver the Community Partnership Programme to local schools in Perth, Dundee and Fife. The work being undertaken links directly to the Safer and Stronger Scotland agenda by reducing offending and helping families and young people at risk.

The aims of the scheme are:

To demonstrate the futility of following a life of crime.

Distinguish fact from fiction with regard to prison life.

To give an insight as to the workings of a prison and the associated issues that arise.

This work is viewed by the VC as being of the highest order, making a most valuable contribution to working with the community and assisting to divert our young people from embarking on a life of crime.

Equality & Diversity

The SPS is committed to equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights. This is evident in the treatment and provision for prisoners at HMP Perth. Induction for new prisoners outlines the routine and regimes of the prison. The VC has access to the minutes of the Equality and Diversity group at Perth, however, recently, this group seems to have been disbanded. Hopefully, it will be resurrected as its overview is crucial.

