

Over 21s Visiting Committee

HM Prison and Young Offenders' Institution
Cornton Vale



Annual Report 2013-2014

Won't you give me a chance?
Wont' you give me a clue?
I'm still not sure,
"What is it that you really want me to do"?

My temper takes over you tell me to
"Calm down now"
I yell at the world you tell me to
"Hush now"
I get upset and cry, you tell me to
"Suck it up now"

So, how about I give you a chance,
I give you a clue?
How about you
"Don't tell me what to do"!

Written by Margaret.

Introduction

I wish to take the opportunity to thank the members of the Over 21's Visiting Committee for their time and their considerable efforts in supporting the work of the Committee. During the past three years a decreasing number of members and continuous uncertainty about the future of Visiting Committees has placed a great strain on the remaining Committee members. That the Committee has continued to function effectively with less than half its full complement of members is a great tribute to their commitment and determination.

During the period covered by this report the prison has undergone radical refurbishments and very substantial changes of staff. I would wish to take the opportunity to recognise the commitment of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service including in tackling the issue of improving the physical conditions within which women are held and the staff work. I am also pleased to see the extension of the refurbishment programme and its contribution to improving the facilities for visitors and the establishment of the Family Centre and Help Hub.

In order to facilitate refurbishment, a considerable number of women and staff were moved temporarily to Polmont YOI. I would wish to commend the management and staff of Polmont YOI for making this opportunity available and supporting the women, staff and our members during this move.

Substantial changes to accommodation patterns and staff deployment within Cornton Vale have posed significant challenges for our members. I would wish to record our appreciation of the forbearance of management and staff in supporting us through this period of change and uncertainty.

Two Committee members have retired during the year and I would wish to thank them of their services to the Committee.

We are grateful to Falkirk Council for the provision of clerking services and support and for printing this report.

Finally, I would wish to record our appreciation for the co-operation of and support from management and staff in Cornton Vale, upon which our work in the prison also depends.

Moira Graham, Convener
20th June, 2014

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1. Statutory Role of the Visiting Committee

The statutory responsibilities of Visiting Committees and of their members are set out in Part 17 of The Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 2006 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:

- co-operate with Scottish Ministers and the Governor in promoting the efficiency of the prison;
- inquire into and report to Scottish Ministers upon any matter into which they may ask them to inquire;
- 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;
- 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, record any deficiencies in their minute book and send a copy to Scottish Ministers and the Governor;
- hear and investigate any applications or complaints which prisoners may make to them and report their findings to the Governor and Scottish Ministers;
- visit the prison fortnightly by not fewer than two of its members;
- at its discretion inspect prison records other than personal records, prisoners' records and security manuals or other papers which have implications for security and make a note of their inspection in their minutes; and
- make an annual report 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 include any advice and suggestions they consider appropriate.



2. Executive Summary

This has been a rewarding but challenging year for the prison. With considerable support from the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), the prison has continued with a major accelerating refurbishment programme. By the end of the year, the bulk of the residential work will have been completed and the emphasis will shift to other areas.

Maintaining the functions of a closed prison around extensive refurbishment work has been a daunting and demanding management and administrative task, requiring considerable staff resources. The need to move women around was greatly helped by the willingness of Polmont YOI to allow the temporary accommodation of women while Cornton Vale residential premises were refurbished. The decision to take Cornton Vale staff to Polmont was greatly appreciated by the women who went there.

We would wish to express our appreciation to all the staff who were involved in planning and supporting the internal and external moves to allow refurbishment work to take place. We would also wish to commend the Cornton Vale and SPS staff involved in planning, delivering and supporting refurbishment. While we continue to have concerns that large numbers of women are still accommodated in cells which do not have internal sanitation, we appreciate that the refurbishment of the fabric and fittings and replacement of linen and clothing has greatly improved the experience of women. The internal and external appearance of the estate has been transformed and we can see that the next stages of refurbishment will create a difference to further areas.

We would also like to commend the garden work party for its improvement of the grounds.

During the year the high level of changes in staffing has continued. We welcome the arrival of considerable numbers of new members of staff and, in talking and listening to them, we can see the principles espoused by senior SPS management coming through in their training and their appreciation of what it is that a prison officer should be seeking to achieve. We also welcome the opportunities which existing and new members of staff have had to take on in terms of new challenges. All of this movement has had a downside in terms of constant shifts of responsibility and changes in the roles

of individual managers and staff. As we move into the closing years of Cornton Vale's life as the National Reception Prison for women, we anticipate that there will be many more challenges ahead and would hope that this period will be one of greater stability.

Within the constraints of the layout of the campus, staffing, refurbishment and finance available, women have been able to continue to access previous levels of education, work and training opportunities. The contribution of work party members and supervising staff continues to make an invaluable contribution to the daily life of the prison and to the quality of life of the women. We particularly welcome plans to extend opportunities to women on remand, given the high numbers sent to Cornton Vale.

During the year we have seen an increase in the level of community contacts and family connections, the development of the Family Centre and Help Hub being the most obvious.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The continuing commitment to improving the environment and experience for women, their visitors and staff.
- The quality of the planning, management and delivery of refurbishment and the value of the end results.
- The commitment to improving the work, training and educational opportunities available to all women.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- The high numbers of women with serious mental health problems and remand women being sent to Cornton Vale.
- During the course of the year a large number of members of staff have taken on different responsibilities for specific areas of senior and middle management. While we recognise that, in the main, this reflects internal restructuring, we would hope for more stability in the coming year.
- The difficulties of delivering programmes, especially to women transferred to other prisons.
- The impact which the wide range of prisoners attending many work parties has on the amount of time which some work party supervisors spend managing prisoner interaction.

3. Description of the Prison

Built in 1975, Cornton Vale initially held convicted women and young offenders. In 1978 Parliament passed the necessary legislation to allow women and young offenders to be held there on remand.

Cornton Vale is the primary establishment in Scotland for holding female offenders remanded or sentenced to prison by the courts. The prison provides facilities for female prisoners (including young offenders) in all sentence ranges and supervision levels. It has a design capacity of 309 places. This figure includes 24 spaces within the Independent Living Units (ILUs), adjacent to the prison grounds, for appropriate women nearing the end of their sentences and seven mother and baby spaces available inside the prison. In total, the prison has six accommodation blocks: Bruce House, Peebles House, Wallace House, Younger House, Skye House and Ross House (including the Dumyat Unit). Wallace House, Ross House and the Dumyat Unit have integral cell sanitation, while the other residential blocks have communal toilet, shower and bathing accommodation.

All residential units have dining areas, pantries and communal areas. There is a central block housing the Link Centre, kitchen area, laundry, education, cookery and library, programmes, addictions, the gymnasium, social work staff and three work party areas (Industrial Cleaning, Card Workshop and Recycabike). There is a separate health centre, chapel and garden/recycling work party area. Prisoner reception and visiting areas are housed in the main administrative block and a Help Hub has recently been opened just outside the prison. Whilst Cornton Vale is Scotland's only all-female prison, women are held in other facilities. There are currently up to 110 women in HMP Edinburgh, up to 53 women housed in Greenock Prison's Darroch Hall and up to 50 will be housed in the newly opened HMP Grampian. In addition, there are small community integration units for women at HMP Inverness and HMP Grampian. There are currently between 30- 40 women on Home Detention Curfew.

4. Principal Areas within the Prison

4.1 Healthcare and Mental Health:

The Health Centre is responsible for all of the mental health and primary care needs of prisoners, including addictions, and is delivered by NHS Forth Valley. There continue to be two nursing teams (mental health and primary care), a doctor, a dentist, a pharmacy assistant, administrative support and visiting professionals. The Centre remains extremely busy and although figures show over the last year that it still generates the highest number of complaints to us by far, these are substantially reduced on previous years.

The change to management by the NHS rather than by SPS has been challenging and there have been a number of staff changes. However it is felt that the move has been positive overall. The NHS has given access to a knowledge and skills base. There are opportunities for training, particularly on-line, and the opportunity of a wider base of job opportunities. The introduction of the NHS computer systems has not given access to all patient information but it has greatly improved access, particularly to prescribed medication. Now much fewer faxes need to be sent to prescribers

for details which often resulted in numerous complaints to us over the resultant delay in receiving prescriptions. Nurses now also all have a minimum of two years of experience and it is hoped to appoint a nurse prescriber shortly.

The decision to retain staff numbers, as the number of women was reduced from its high of last year by movements to Greenock and Edinburgh, has proved to be a good one. Members of staff feel that they now have the time to properly address the needs of the women and to run specialist classes and groups. Clinics are going well and there are no long waiting lists. The move of staff to support women in Polmont also brought challenges but it was a positive move much appreciated by the women.

As noted in previous reports, the physical condition of the Health Centre has been a concern for some time.

There is a real need to improve the quality of health areas and we understand that the decision has been taken to improve the medical area in Reception, which is very welcome.

Whilst the Triage system works well, there is a perception amongst many women that it is difficult to see a doctor in Cornton Vale. During our visits it was pointed out that the system ensures that women are seen quickly by a nurse and, if appropriate, are then seen by a doctor. Visiting Committee members also regularly receive comments about prescriptions being changed. It was pointed out to us by the Health Centre that in some cases medicines prescribed are not the most appropriate in which case an alternative is prescribed.

The introduction of the two tier complaints system, following the transfer of responsibility of health from the SPS to the NHS, had introduced a degree of confusion amongst women and residential staff. Some women had also complained about the delay in getting replies to their complaints. The two forms have now been incorporated into a single form and there is a much clearer explanation of the two systems on the reverse of the form. It is hoped that this will allow the women to make an informed decision about which box to tick in the knowledge of the different timescales involved with each process. It was agreed that a focus group would be helpful in checking the understanding of this.

We continue to be concerned by the number of women with serious mental health issues who are being sent to Cornton Vale. Again, whilst we recognise the considerable efforts to manage and support such women, staff members are still dealing with many women whose needs are beyond the provision which a prison establishment can be reasonably expected to offer.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The continued commitment of health staff to provide and maintain a high level of service and the subsequent reduction in complaints being made to us in relation to healthcare.
- The decision to retain staff numbers when the population is substantially reduced.
- The improved complaints form to ensure that women are able to make an informed decision.
- Improvements to the fabric of the Health Centre.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- The number of women with severe mental health issues who continue to be sent to Cornton Vale.
- Despite improvements, the Health Centre is not providing a quality environment for the delivery of a health service.

4.2 Food:

The catering work party meets the daily needs of a changing number of women with varied needs and shifting residential locations on a seven days a week basis. This requires a high degree of co-ordination, extended hours of working and the support of residential staff and pantry workers.

National menu choices provide a basic structure around which special dietary needs are organised with a range of vegetarian requirements, halal food and special diets for pregnant women being met on a regular basis. Working within strict budgetary constraints, staff provide a varied and quality diet. In season produce from the gardening work party is utilised.

The quality of food being produced is consistently good. However, the need to transport hot food in trolleys to residential blocks does require careful handling to ensure temperatures are maintained. Transport inevitably leads to certain food types becoming less palatable as they become steamed during transit and whilst waiting to be served. Considerable efforts go into helping residential and pantry staff to maintain safe temperatures and optimum conditions for transit and storage.

4.3 Equality and Diversity:

The Equality and Diversity Group (E & D) met quarterly during the year and considered a number of issues:

- The prison population and identification of these women with protected characteristics and the level of support required and provided.
- Complaints and whether any complaints had been made in conjunction with E & D issues.
- Equality and Diversity impact assessments.
- Event planning and training for staff and prisoners.

There was a suggestion that the Group should have prisoner representation at meetings but this did not receive any support from the women. It was felt by the Group that the environment was probably a little intimidating for the women and that another forum be used for the women to raise E & D issues to be reported back to the E & D Group.

During the year the establishment hosted International Women's Day events which were run in conjunction with the New College Lanarkshire, the Education provider. The events focused on inspirational speakers, poets and musicians. The gymnasium held an event which was designed to encourage women who don't attend the gym regularly to take part in low intensity exercise. New College Lanarkshire arranged an art

exhibition event in conjunction with Create and Curate which allowed women to display their art work and poetry in the Central Block Foyer. Plans have been made for a range of inspirational and informative speakers to attend the prison and speak to the women. Women's Aid delivered a session in the prison and plans made for delivery of a first-hand account of Human Trafficking by one of the family help hub staff.

In June of last year an event was held to celebrate Refugee week. This was run in conjunction with New College Lanarkshire and included day time and evening sessions. These included reading and creative classes, music sessions and inspirational guest speakers. There was an African dress making workshop and a presentation on forced marriage from a young woman who had come to Scotland as a refugee.

The PE department provided an exercise session which was designed to reflect travelling a mile, either by bike or on foot. The essence of this work was to elicit some thoughts regarding the difficulty some refugees have in performing simple tasks such as carrying water or attending school. The culmination was an open air barbecue which featured food from around the world.

A very successful 'Strictly Come Dancing' event was planned and then held in the gymnasium on 2 April. This was linked as a charity event to National Autistic Day. The event was well supported by women in the establishment and raised approximately £100 for the National Autistic Society (NAS). The E & D Group have also planned a debate with guest speakers around the Scottish Independence Referendum.

During the year the twelve named, E & D officers have worked with women who have any issues around protected characteristics including race, age, disability, sexual orientation, faith and belief, gender, maternity, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The efforts put in by staff and outside agencies to support a wide range of participative activities and the response of women to these opportunities.

4.4 Education, Training, Work, the Gym and Remand Prisoners:

a) Education:

The emphasis is on the core skills of literacy and numeracy but there are also courses on offer related to life skills and further learning opportunities, evidenced through a comprehensive timetable. There have been a few significant changes over the year.

The contract is still with Motherwell College, with lecturers coming in regularly to facilitate the

programmes and the name has now changed to New College Lanarkshire.

The Universal Credit Course is currently under review and is not running at the moment. It did however attract some interest but the review process involves looking at the content to ensure that it is relevant. An "introduction to workplace skills" which is being piloted at Polmont currently, run by Skills Development Scotland, is being considered for use in Cornton Vale at some time in the future.

The library is again open after refurbishment and restocking and is an attractive environment. It continues to be run by one pass lady, but as there is no real resource behind it in terms of an appointed librarian, it continues to be underused. Education use the library for classes but running it is not part of their contract. Stirling Council continues to renew stock well and regularly and is able to provide books in different languages on request.

Cookery classes provide skills in food preparation, cookery and baking techniques are also popular with women looking forward to tasting their results. Qualifications can also be gained and classes link to various events in the prison helping to provide additional treats. Budgets require to be discussed in order to maintain this valuable opportunity for women.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The fact that there is a great deal of project work going on including Artlink, film studies, a library project, cookery classes and the "Create and Curate" project. These projects are attracting a significant number of women to take part.
- The proposition that women will be offered a pre-release work party looking over a three month period on constructive skills.
- The focus on women's needs when raising awareness about adult learning and the possibility of peer tutor training.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- Continued underuse of the library and the inability to appoint a designated librarian.

b) Training and Work:

Activities and opportunities offered include a Bike Workshop, Craft Enterprise, Garden Work Party (including Waste Management & Recycling), Hairdressing & Beauty Therapy, Industrial Cleaning, Laundry, Catering and Pantry & Housekeeping.

Bike Workshop - The project has great potential for giving women skills and recognised training which are

relevant to future employment opportunities and have a recognised value. The workshop has first class community links through its association with the Recycabike workshop in Stirling. It provides the bikes for refurbishment and accept the refurbished bikes for community disposal.

Working successfully in the workshop requires a degree of manual dexterity, problem solving skills and a willingness to focus on the work in hand. One of the challenges is dealing with the mixture of women who are sent to the workshop. Some lack the dexterity and skills and some are not motivated or lack both the skills and the motivation. Occasionally, a great deal of effort goes into managing the behaviour of women instead of entering them into training and supervising bike refurbishment.

Craft Enterprise continues to be a popular workshop with a regular number of women involved in the creation of beautiful cards which are purchased by prisoners. The toiletry shop is doing very well. There is therefore no difficulty with budgeting. High workload and staff cover issues mean that work in delivering SVQ's has been delayed.

The Garden Work Party has continued to support recycling whilst improving the environment of the grounds with increased use of polytunnels, due to some welcome finance. There is now widespread availability of vegetables, tomatoes, peppers and herbs for the cookhouse as well as a wide range of flowers and bedding plants. Contact has been established with a variety of venues and businesses to extend community links and the work party has been successfully providing training on garden modules.

The Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy Work Party is popular both as a place of training and in providing the women with opportunities to look their best for events and family visits. There is a relaxed and happy atmosphere within sessions and the opportunity for women to gain useful, marketable skills is to be valued and commended. Furnishing renovation manicure and waxing sessions have been introduced on Wednesday mornings with varying massage treatments on Wednesday afternoons. These have proved popular. Four portfolios have been entered for THE Koestler awards with results expected in August and later this year Corntonvale is hosting the Interprison hairdressing competition.

The Laundry currently has a high number of women allocated and this together with a wide eclectic mix makes for a challenging environment at times. It is a very structured work party with good routines and a

focus on teamwork. Laundry work plays an essential role within the prison which fluctuates in work load according to increase and decrease within the prison population. Staff enjoy working closely with other services within the prison encouraging women to make good progress. Security for possessions is a high priority but improvements have been made with regard to longer drying times and an increase in kitbag sizes.

Industrial Cleaning numbers in the work party have fluctuated because of the movement of women to other establishments and it has been hard at times to cover work party requirements. It might be helpful to ringfence some women to help with continuity and effective organisation within the work party. Women participate in SQA courses covering the first four certificates in Industrial Cleaning and Bio Hazard training continues as required.

Catering meet one of the fundamental needs of prisoners: a regularly supplied, healthy, appropriate and varied diet. Unlike most other work parties, the activity of the catering work party can never be delayed or put off. They are required to provide a demand led service at fixed times of the day, seven days a week. Full details of the services provided was given in section 4.2 Food.

Pantry and Housekeeping are also essential services, again operating seven days a week, and are sometimes not recognised for their importance. The work women undertake and staff manage make a considerable impact on the quality of all the women's lives. The work also has considerable significance for health and safety, in terms of food serving and cleaning.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The various Work Parties are to be congratulated in maintaining quality operation during the period of transfer for many women to Polmont, and ensuring the continued essential services, particularly with regard to laundry, catering, cleaning and housekeeping. Other work parties have continued to make valuable contributions to the environment, skills, comfort and safety of the women.
- Extensive links with the community as part of workshop development.
- The emphasis in every workshop on giving women skills and training which are relevant to future employability.
- The decision to extend work opportunities to remand prisoners.
- The commitment to not moving prisoners to another establishment when they are undergoing SVQ training.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- The need in some workshops to deal with behavioural issues sometimes makes training challenging

c) Gym Facility:

Over the last year there have been a few changes in the gym resulting in a much greater use of the facility by the women. Staff report that numbers are at their highest ever. The refurbishment has allowed for greater space and a more inviting environment.

As well as continuing to provide exercise to music, zumba and metafit, staff have started a Breakfast Club which has proved increasingly popular, rising from 1 or 2 attendees to anything now between 10 and 22. A Walking Club has been a new feature and is attracting a number of women and new qualifications have been introduced. Sessions for mothers with babies are also still available when required.

A class for convicted prisoners takes place in the evenings with numbers rising to the mid-twenties and is now at its maximum. The gym is also now very well used at weekends which is an improvement from last year. Whilst there is still room for improved use at various times during the day, staff recognise that women are frequently affected by issues around their physical and mental wellbeing, and that together with other activities, means that there will always be a section of women for whom the gym facility is not an option.

Through a charitable donation the gym has been given an investment of £16,000 over the next 3 years which will be used to provide further qualifications and programmes and more leaders.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The enthusiasm of staff and motivating new activities which have increased the women's use of the facilities over this year.

d) Remand Prisoners:

The number of women sent to remand has often been high and there is a changing population. Women in remand have reported high levels of uncertainty and a perception of a lack of opportunities to leave the block. It is appreciated that these are issues outwith the control of prison management, but the frustration is understandable. The decision to seek to extend work opportunities to women held in remand is welcome. The decision to extend Enhanced Addiction Services to remand prisoners is also welcomed.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The efforts made to support the needs of women held in remand and extend work opportunities to them.
- The decision to extend Enhanced Addiction Services to remand prisoners.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- The large numbers of women who continue to be sent to Cornton Vale on remand.
- The perception amongst remand prisoners that they have a lack of opportunities to leave the block

4.5 Residential Accommodation:

During the course of the year a substantial refurbishment programme has been in progress, revitalising the residential accommodation in Younger, Bruce and Peebles houses and creating a new National Top End, including the Mother and Baby Unit. Refurbishment has also taken place in Wallace House. Work has started in Skye and the Independent Living Units. Alongside the refurbishment of the fabric and facilities of accommodation blocks, there has been considerable investment in new furniture and bedding. Cornton Vale has been transformed by the work, presenting a cleaner, fresher residential environment.

Younger - accommodating women on remand.

Bruce House - accommodating women who are on high and medium supervision levels.

Peebles House - accommodating women on low supervision and now including a non-smoking unit.

Wallace - accommodating women requiring the least supervision.

National Top End - accommodating women accessing more open conditions.

Mother and Baby Unit - available to accommodate women with young babies.

Ross House - accommodating women with severe mental health issues and the most vulnerable women. While admissions have been reduced since the start of the year, at our last visit Ross House had 40 prisoners and 5 staff and there had been 12 admissions the previous day.

Ross House accommodates women on remand and is also still responsible for prisoners who are on their first night of custody. Plans are in progress to change this system which will involve a more localised and personalised induction process.

Because of the mix of remand, first nighters and challenging and vulnerable prisoners, staff are very

aware of the need to manage the process carefully. However, the arrival of a sudden large number of admissions means women may have to be placed simply where there is room to house them, and this can be problematic.

Staff work hard to offer the women activities when possible, and when it is not too busy, particularly at weekends, when there are no admissions. These include quizzes, karaoke, bingo and zumba via computer. Sports and Games officers also encourage the women to take part in physical exercise including the Walking Club run by the gym.

Dumyat Unit - providing accommodation for women who are considered to require being held separately and with the highest levels of support and supervision. Dumyat currently is also almost at capacity. There are 6 cells, 4 "normal" and 2 "safe". Staff work closely with Mental Health staff and psychologists who offer specialist help.

Independent Living Units (ILUs) - There are six semi detached two storey houses with a capacity for 24 residents, offering open estate accommodation within the community. After inspection, a substantial refurbishment was agreed. The residents were relocated within the National Top End accommodation within the prison at the beginning of March 2014 and are expected to move back into the ILUs by the end of June 2014. Efforts were made to minimise the impact of being moved back into the closed estate, with the only major issue of concern for women being the "time out" licences which they felt did not fit well with the more restrictive regime of the closed prison. These licence conditions were examined with a view to being made less restrictive.

Skye House is currently being refurbished to accommodate young offenders.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The considerable improvements to the residential accommodation and living conditions.
- The temporary movement of women to a hall in Polmont Young Offenders Institute, which allowed the refurbishment of blocks in Cornton Vale to proceed more quickly and with much less disruption.
- The quality of the management of the movement of prisoners to Polmont and within Cornton Vale during refurbishment.
- The high quality of the refurbishment work.
- The planning and management of refurbishment work and the supervision of contractors' staff. (All the

refurbishment was undertaken within a working, closed prison environment).

- The efforts which women in the ILUs have made to keep their living quarters clean and tidy.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- While we appreciate the financial restrictions placed on refurbishing accommodation which it is intended to replace in the medium term, we are concerned that a substantial number of women are being held in accommodation without in-cell sanitation. We still receive reports from women who maintain that they wait for lengthy times for toilet access.
- While we understand the thinking behind introducing carpeting into the residential blocks, we do have some reservations regarding cleaning and health and safety.
- We would welcome more regular and better advertised residential meetings for women.

4.6 Prison Estate & Administration:

a) Estates and Housekeeping: The work to refurbish the fabric, furniture, soft fittings, linen and clothing has been extremely well conducted. The living conditions for women have been transformed from that which we have seen over the past years. The external environment has also been greatly improved.

b) Administration:

Staffing - During the course of the year we have met a large number of new and newly appointed staff. We have been impressed by their attitude, courtesy and willingness to engage. We have welcomed the opportunities given to existing and new staff to experience new responsibilities. At the same time we have been concerned by the number of changes in positions held by senior and middle management. We recognise that much of this is due to the internal movement of existing staff to fill staff departures, restructuring and acting up positions. As the prison enters a relatively short period of transition, prior to being replaced by a new National Facility and Regional facilities, we would see the benefit of a greater degree of stability amongst management.

Appointment of Residential Managers - We very much welcome the principle of clear management structures with defined roles for local managers. Again, however, we have been concerned about the level of staff changes and would welcome a period of stability.

Management Planning - The magnitude, variety and quality of the work which has been undertaken in the past year is quite remarkable. The fact that it has been

achieved against a background of constant changes of personnel and responsibilities is entirely admirable. While it is unfair to single out any single area, the management of the transfer of women to and from Polmont to allow refurbishment in Cornton Vale was particularly efficient and effective.

Visits - We welcome the efforts of management, visiting and residential staff to enable women to take advantage of visits. We appreciate the efforts being made to improve the quality of the visit experience for both women and their visitors. We also recognise the difficulties which refurbishment has brought and look forward to moving past this stage and being able to realise the opportunities provided by the Help Hub. A new form of separate children's visits has been introduced where they are not having to contend with adult visitors. This has proved popular and there are plans to develop this opportunity. In visits to the Saughton and Greenock establishments, we noticed that the level of visiting which women have would appear to be less than that enjoyed by their male counterparts.

Reception - The reception area provides many women with their first experience of prison. Staff and the work party members provide an efficient, effective and welcoming experience. We are hopeful that improvements will be made to the fabric of the area, particularly the health section.

HDC - Release on Home Detention Curfew is a highly motivating factor for many women and clearly offers a period of transition.

First Night in Custody - We appreciate efforts made to tackle the difficulty which many women have during their first few days, particularly those who have never been imprisoned before. We also appreciate that Ross House is the only 24 hour staffed area in the prison. However, we regularly receive adverse comments from women regarding the choice of Ross House as the "first night" location and their experiences there. We understand that plans are afoot for another location which might house women for a longer period of time. We also regularly hear concerns being expressed by women that they have to rely on other women for practical information about the prison regime and routines.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The large number of new staff who have been appointed to Cornton Vale and their positive attitudes.
- The commitment to a clearer, more effective management structure.

- The very high quality of planning for change and refurbishment,
- The efforts made to ensure that women being imprisoned in Cornton Vale are safe and appropriately accommodated.
- The increased opportunities for visiting and family contact and support.
- The willingness to explore new ways of supporting contact between prisoners and their families, particularly children.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- The lower level of visiting which women have as compared to men.
- The need to improve the quality of the reception area.
- The need to have a more appropriate experience of first period in custody, particularly for women on remand.

4.7 Link Centre:

The Link Centre continues to provide an effective, efficient and welcoming service to the women in Cornton Vale, working in conjunction with residential staff and officers in charge of work parties to ensure access to Services. It is a busy area where the National Induction Programme is delivered to newly convicted women. Module 1 is delivered on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and Module 2 on Tuesday. The Over 21's Visiting Committee delivers a short induction module on the role and remit of the Visiting Committee and takes on any issues raised by women.

Outside groups offering services within the Link Centre which is now linked to the health centre, include Open Secret, SACRO, Job Centre Plus, Housing, SHINE (a Women's Monitoring Service) and EACS (formally Phoenix) In addition, a great deal of information is available on the wall racks, including various help lines for the women.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The central role of the Link Centre in supporting women to access internal and external support.
- The quality of care provided by Link Centre and supporting staff.

5. Other Areas within the Prison

5.1 Family Contact Development Officers:

The current emphasis by senior Scottish Prison Service management on the importance of involving and engaging with families is greatly encouraging. During this past year the FCDO's, as have many other groups, experienced a challenging year in terms of a number of changes in managers. There is a need, in these uncertain times to ensure consistent leadership.

The system of encouraging women to communicate by e-mail continues to be successful, although it is taken up by particular groups of women and not by others.

The development of the new style children's visiting in the main visits area has gone well. This system is designed to increase the amount of time mothers are able to spend with their children and allows the visit to include another family member, bringing practice in Cornton Vale in line with other establishments. This has increased the uptake, with 18 women currently on the scheme, some of whom are combining these visits with Little Cherub visits. The pressure is particularly on the Sunday sessions, which are currently full, rather than schooldays, which are more difficult for children and adult visitors. A request is currently being considered for a Saturday session.

Little Cherub's visits are still well supported, but the selection process has been made more robust and it is now more difficult for women to access them after admission. While it is the mothers who are being considered more robustly, the process is adversely affecting the children as well.

Work is still in progress to support the Family Centre and Help Hub and it is anticipated that this will be easier when the front of house work is completed and better weather arrives.

The removal of selected women to Greenock and Edinburgh has changed the nature of the population in Cornton Vale and the appearance of large numbers of women on remand has posed additional challenges for staff.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The continued high quality of service delivered by the FCDO's.
- The commitment to the importance of involving and engaging with families.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- A high level of changes of personnel in senior and middle management posts

5.2 Social Work:

Social Work Services are fully staffed with experienced,

committed staff and providing holistic support meeting the needs of prisoners. Service provision is managed in relation to a service level agreement with Stirling Council. As this was initially a generic agreement across the SPS establishments, it required adjustments to meet the needs of female prisoners. There are good relations with other staff, particularly senior prison management. National Risk assessments are being carried out and staff support the Programme Management Board and the Risk Management team, which meet on alternative Thursdays. Changes to staffing structures within the prison have led to a clearer understanding of the roles of individual members of staff and improved communications.

Staff are located in accommodation at the rear of the Central Block, adjacent to the Link Centre. This location ensures that all staff are accommodated in the one place which is secure and convenient for women attending the Link Centre. Following a Health and Safety inspection new lighting has been agreed, which will make a substantial improvement to working conditions.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The work undertaken to support women.

5.3 Programmes:

This has been a challenging year. There have been a number of issues, including staff supporting the training of new recruits in the staff college, a number of programmes and psychology staff being on sick leave and difficulties with women who have been moved out of Cornton Vale to other prisons, refusing to come back to attend programmes. In addition, there have been occasions when the manager has had to cover for sickness absence in other areas of the prison. While these issues have seriously impacted on the work of Programmes, particularly Substance Related Offending Behaviour (SROB) programme, every effort has been made to meet, or exceed, set targets. An overall target of 85 women through Programmes was met by delivering 109 women through, though the extra numbers were in approved programmes. In terms of accredited offending programmes:

Programme	Target	No. Through
Constructs	8	5
FOB	10	10
Substance Abuse	13	10

Efforts are now going in come up with innovative ways of supporting women through programmes. Much effort has gone into Survive and Thrive. This is a trauma related programme and women are not pressured to talk if they don't wish to. The programme was nominated for the Butler Trust Award and staff

members are looking to expand it to a larger number of women. The possibility of offering Female Offending Behaviour (FOB) and SROB together was being examined.

Links with other organisations that deliver compatible aims to Programmes and which might help to meet the identified needs of women are being explored as a means of overcoming staff shortages. These include working with Artlink, Education and the Garden Work Party. Open Secret is now offering bereavement support. With the previous withdrawal of this service from the Chaplaincy, this is a welcome move.

Staff in programmes need a wide range of experience, training and skills. In developing staff training the key issue is felt to be "How, in a changing staffing situation, can you maximise the transfer of knowledge?". Recently, in a visit from Phoenix House staff, the possibility was examined of giving women more responsibility for managing their own experiences.

Programmes are responsible for managing the two MDT officers and the FCDO's, who have been joined by a new member of staff. A new Child's Visit session has been introduced. This is a one hour session, primarily aimed at supporting children, is held in the visit room after normal visiting is over and is open to parents and some grandparents. The Saturday and Sunday sessions are more popular as they do not interfere with school attendance.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The efforts of staff to continue to deliver a service in the face of many challenges.
- The commitment to exploring new and innovative methods of meeting the needs of women.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- The impact of staff shortages.
- The implications of combining FOB and SROB.

5.4 Chaplaincy:

Much of the effort of the chaplaincy goes into pastoral contact. Numbers attending regular services have increased. Christmas services took place on Christmas Eve (Roman Catholic vigil Mass) and Christmas Day (Church of Scotland). The Rosary Group and Mothers' Prayers took place on a weekly. The chaplains have been encouraging community contact – through religious events, concerts and coffee events. A Christmas Carol concert was held with Dunblane Cathedral Choir leading the praise. More than 40 guests were in attendance.

Eight prisoners from the ILUs attended the Prisoners' Week church service in Dunblane. In December there was a concert with a mixture of Christian and popular songs. As in previous years, every prisoner received a

Christmas card with handwritten message from the women of the Mother's Union of the Episcopalian Church of the diocese, delivered by the chaplains. On Christmas day, every prisoner received a gift pack of handmade greetings cards, also donated by the Mothers' Union.

One of the chaplains (Patricia) returned to Malawi on 4/10 to promote further the twinning between the women's prison there (Chichiri prison) and Cornton Vale. As before, gifts were taken from the Citizenship Class in Education, as well as letters/cards from pen-pals and monies raised by the women in Cornton Vale (which provided each prisoner in Malawi with the equivalent of £3.00 to buy food). The joint Mothers' Prayer groups continue on a weekly basis.

Chaplains continue to attend Equality and Diversity meetings and Mental Health Team meetings.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The great value of 1:1 pastoral care.
- The substantial involvement of women with community groups and individuals.

5.5 The Family Centre and Help Hub:

Stirling Interfaith Community Justice Group is a charity established by representatives of the churches and other faith groups in the Stirling area. The charity works in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service and Fife and Forth Valley Community Justice Authority to manage and run the Family Centre and Help Hub. The Hub is staffed by a centre manager, centre worker and administrator who work with some 45 plus volunteers. The Hub aims to provide a supportive, friendly and welcoming environment for families visiting a prisoner. By making visits less stressful and more positive, the Hub aims to maintain family ties by encouraging more frequent visits. In turn, this aims to reduce re-offending, increase the stability of children's lives and achieve positive long term outcomes for all the of family.

Volunteers are given specialised training and the support of a member of staff or experienced volunteer for their first few shifts. Staff work with external agencies, including Stirling Women's Aid, Families Outside, Circle (Shine) and CAB Stirling, together with a number of NHS services. A Credit Union has been established and there are plans to introduce a volunteer Visitor programme for women who do not receive regular, or indeed any visits.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- The commitment of the partners to providing and supporting a much valued service.
- The efforts of the community and volunteers to support the work of the centre.
- The efforts of the group and staff to setting up and managing the facility.

6. The Work of the Visiting Committee 2013-2014

6.1 Visiting Committee Statistics:

6.1 Visiting Committee Statistics	2013-14	2012-13
Recommended complement of VC members	15	15
Number of VC members at start of the reporting period	10	9
Number of VC members at end of the reporting period	6	10
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	0	2
Number of VC members leaving within the reporting period	4S	1
Total number of VC committee meetings during reporting period	7	7
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	6	6
Total number of applications received	140	105
Total number of visits to the prison	291	338

6.2 Members:

Jim Blackwood, Murray Dickie, Moira Graham, Janelle Hall, Alison Lambie, Joyce Macfarlane, Rosemary McKinlay (Until March 2014), Sharon Mylchreest (Until March 2014) Joan Paterson (Until May 2013) and Marilyn Stenhouse.

For the second year running, members have responded to a request to carry on the work of the Visiting Committee in the continuing failure to provide new legislation to set in place a system of independent prison monitoring to replace Visiting Committees.

During this year, as in the past three years, members have spent a considerable amount of time out with their normal prison centred duties responding to the repeated discussions regarding the future of independent prison monitoring. This on-going commitment has been sustained, despite a complete lack of confidence in the nature and outcome of the consultation processes.

Continuing changes and uncertainty around the future of VCs led to a further reduction in the number of members. The membership of the Committee now stands at 7, less than half the required level of members.

6.3 Activities:

Core Activity: Members responded to 91 requests from the prison gate book to speak with women about issues they wished to raise. The response times to requests for a visit from a VC member are listed below:

6.3 a) Gate Book Applications by Response Time 2013-2014 and 2012-2013				
Response Time	2013-2014		2012-2013	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0 to 5 days	60	66	53	72
6 to 10 days	20	22	14	19
10+ days	11	12	7	9
Totals	91	100	74	100

Members also responded to requests from 49 women who met them en route, giving a total of 140 requests. 243 follow up visits were undertaken to progress issues raised by these women. Members support a rota providing support for the weekly induction programme for recently convicted women (meeting 191 women). One residential meeting was attended during the year. All statutory visits, other visits and follow up visits to women and induction sessions are followed by written reports submitted to the Governor.

6.3 b) Contact with Women

Nature of Contact	2013-2014		2012-2013	
	Number of Women	%	Number of Women	%
Requests for Assistance (Gate Book)	91	16	74	14
Requests for Assistance (On Route)	49	8	35	7
Follow-up Visits	243	42	186	36
Induction	191	33	219	42
Residential Meetings	5	1	2	<1
Total Contacts	579	100	516	100

Other Activities: During the year members also attended Visiting Committee meetings, visits about and to Polmont YOI, formal and informal training, data collection for reports, Association of Visiting Committee meetings, the Association of Visiting Committees Annual Conference, meetings of the Criminal Justice Authority and contributed to consultations.

Member Training: Members attended formal training within the SPS Training Centre at Polmont and in Cornton Vale (introductory training, advanced training, anti-hostage training, personal safety training, fire safety and key and fob training in Polmont Young Offender's Institute.) In addition, topics covered at Board meetings by guest speakers included the Female Offending Behaviour Programme, the Women's Strategy and the National Performance Framework.

6.3 c) Breakdown of Activities Undertaken By Members in 2013-14

Activity	2013-2014			2012-2013		
	Member Contacts	Hours	% of Hrs	Member Contacts	Hours	% of Hrs
Direct Contact With Prisoners and Statutory Visits (1)	235	324	68	286	304	53
Visiting Committee Meetings	31	62	13	48	130	23
Visits about and to Polmont Prison	11	22	5	6	13	<1
Visiting Committee Formal and informal Training	9	29	6	18	61	11
Data Collection for Reports	5	3	1	4	2	<1
Association of Visiting Committee Meetings	5	12	3	3	9	2
Consultations	5	10	2	4	23	2
Association of Visiting Committee Conference	1	6	1	2	18	3
Criminal Justice Authority Meetings	1	2	<1	1	3	1
Other Visits	2	5	1	2	5	4
Total (2) and (3)	305	475	100	374	568	100

- (1) As part of the mentoring process some visits were attended by two members.
 (2) For contact with women.
 (3) This does not include travel time and time spent writing reports.

6.4 Analysis of All Issues Raised by Women

Topic	2013-2014		2012-2013		Change *
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Accommodation	11	9	59	20	-55
Discipline/Security	15	11	21	7	+57
Diversity Related	1	1	0	0	NS
Education/training/work	1	1	19	6	-83
Estates and housekeeping	9	7	34	11	-36
Family/visits	12	9	16	5	+80
Food	0	0	4	1	NS
HDC	5	4	4	1	NS
Health Related	31	24	55	18	+33
Inter-estate/cross border	7	5	14	5	NS
Open Estate/ILU	8	6	15	5	+20
Personal/property	4	3	17	6	-50
Prisoner related issues	0	0	7	2	NS
Progression	17	13	22	7	+86
Staff Related issues	4	3	8	3	NS
Miscellaneous	5	4	6	2	NS
Total Issues raised	131	100	301	100	

* This is the change between the percentage of issues raised in 2012-13 and 2013-14



6.5 Detailed Breakdown of the Issues Raised by Women During 2013-2014

Topic	Number	Detail
Accommodation	12	Toilet and shower access (6), toilet in Reception (1), accommodation not suitable (1), condition of food cupboard (1), Mother and Baby Unit facilities (1), water in shower scalding (1), privacy issue (1).
Discipline/Security	15	Closed Visits (4), Downgrading (7), Lost property (2), Orderly Room (1), Waiting for discipline report (1).
Diversity Related	1	Discrimination (1)
Education/training/work	1	Access to work (1)
Estates and housekeeping	9	Access to shop (4), Shop choice (1), Faulty phone in Wallace (1), Toilet in visits area (1), TVs (2).
Family/visits	12	Special Escorted Leave (4), Lifers' Family Visits stopped (6), Little Cherubs (2).
Food	0	
HDC	5	Access to TAG license (5).
Health Related	31	Access to health care (11), access to dental care (2), medication (12), access to mental health (3), NHS complaint delay (2), medical care (1).
Inter-estate/cross border	7	Transfer to Edinburgh (5), transfer to Greenock (1), inter-prison access (1).
Open Estate/ILU	8	Licence for ILU (5), ILU move (2), access to ILU (1).
Personal/property	4	Property missing (2), toiletries missing (1), distribution of toiletries (1).
Prisoner related issues	0	Access to progression (14), 2:1 work (1), FOB report (1).
Progression	17	
Staff Related issues	2	Inappropriate staff behaviour (2), property missing (1).
Miscellaneous	5	Access to money (1), Charity Involvement (1), PCF (w Jail shirt in hot weather (1)
Total Issues raised	131	



