



ASSOCIATION OF VISITING COMMITTEES
FOR SCOTTISH PENAL ESTABLISHMENTS

**ANNUAL REPORT
2013-2014**

**YOI VISITING COMMITTEE
HMP & YOI CORNTON VALE**

**CORNTON VALE YOUNG OFFENDERS INSTITUTION
VISITING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

James Scott	Chairman
Julie McEachern	Vice-Chairman
Mirren Begbie	(Resigned August 2013)
Christine Grant J.P.	
Penny Johnston	
Anne Montgomery J.P.	
Jan Nicholson	(Resigned January 2014)
Alastair Howie	From October 2013
Myra Christie	Clerk

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;
- 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.

INTRODUCTION

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Report for the Visiting Committee for the Young Offenders Institution, Cornton Vale, Stirling.

At the start of the reporting period we had seven members on our Committee and at the end, six members, after 2 resignations and 1 new recruit. It is my first wish to thank my colleagues for the dedication they have shown in carrying out their duties over the past year.

The decision to replace Visiting Committees with a new system remains unresolved. The Cabinet Secretary in December 2011 announced that the Visiting Committees were to be abolished but as at the writing of this Report, Parliament has not yet endorsed a new System for Monitoring. It is appreciated that discussions are taking place with Civil Servants but as yet, no instructions have been forthcoming to clarify the role of any proposed changes to the roles of the VC. This is clearly an unsatisfactory situation since members of the VC not knowing what the situation will be in the future are resigning and experienced members are very dissatisfied with the position and very much less enthusiastic.

Despite this, my Committee continues to give the same dedication and commitment to their voluntary duties and have retained the reputation of the Committee as will be seen later in this Report.

The Committee members continue to maintain their excellent level of attendance. Regrettably, during the year we had two resignations from the Committee, being Mirren Begbie and Jan Nicholson who were long serving and dedicated members having a combined service of 14 years. I wish to formally record my personal thanks for their willingness to help out in times of illness of other members when they increased their own personal time to perform tasks without question to maintain the high standard this Committee enjoys.

As a replacement for these two resignations, we were fortunate to obtain the services of Dr. Alastair Howie who had a first-hand knowledge of Cornton Vale having been the Prison Doctor, prior to his retirement. His appointment followed the post being advertised and his being interviewed by my Vice Chair and Penny Johnston and we have been fortunate to obtain his services. We still require to replace one member and are currently looking for a suitable candidate.

Despite fluctuations in members, all Statutory Visits were properly undertaken and completed in accordance with the mandatory requirements. Our Clerk prepared a diary for each Member's Visits and this was followed rigorously. Follow-up visits to address concerns were duly undertaken, sometimes involving colleagues making several visits to the establishment to be certain that Prisoners were being reassured that their concerns were being heeded.

We have found that by follow up visits which are one-to-one, members can achieve speedy resolutions to issues which some may regard as complaints and this is not only time saving, but expeditious in nature, and such an approach is welcomed by the Residential Managers and Governor.

Despite our being a Committee of only seven, we have to undertake those same duties of larger Committees which can number twenty personnel, which clearly shows the dedication and diligence of our Members.

Meetings of Committees

The Committee meets on a bi-monthly basis within the Establishment and statistics for visits are attached.

A Formal Agenda and record of Minutes are submitted to the Government.

It is our policy that good Governance is followed at all times and minutes are circulated within a seven day cycle to members. All meetings are properly convened and conform to the Ethics in Public Life documentation.

In conducting our meetings we have the presence of the Governor or Deputy and, in addition, we invite Staff Members to brief us at our Meetings which helps greatly to understand properly the roles and functions of staff. During the year our Staff were faced with the task of transferring the Prisoners to Polmont to permit alteration work at Cornton Vale. Not only was this handled with due diligence but this delicate operation was smoothly done and thanks must go to all involved but in particular to our Deputy Governor whose responsibility this was. My thanks also go to our Committee who were also 'transferred' and who carried on with their duties without question. The Prisoners also settled well and there were no incidents in what could have been a difficult time, so well done to all.

During the year we saw the retiral of HMCIP. From our perspective, the work he carried out for Cornton Vale was a complete success in that his observations in his Inspection Reports, for the most part, were implemented. Due to the persistence of the Brigadier, Cornton Vale is now a better place and we, as a Committee, thank him for not only listening to us, but involving us in his deliberations.

I would like to thank my Vice Chair (Julie), for taking over my position which I had to vacate due to illness for some 6 months and she carried the burden without question. On my return everything was clearly in place, and for her carrying out additional duties and time taken, thanks are due.

Section 2**CONTENTS**

Table - Visiting Committee Members	p1
Section 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Statutory Role of Visiting Committee</i> 	p2
Introduction	pp3-4
Section 2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Contents</i> 	p5
Section 3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Description of Prison</i> 	p6
Section 4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Executive Summary</i> 	p7
Conclusion	p8
Section 5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Healthcare and Mental Health</i> <i>Food - Kitchen</i> <i>Equality and Diversity</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Training & Work</i> <i>Residential Accommodation</i> <i>Prison Estate</i> <i>The Hub Family Centre</i> <i>Link Centre & Induction</i> 	p9 p10 p11 p12 pp13-14 p15 p16 p17 pp18-19
Section 6 Other Areas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Staffing</i> 	p20
Specialist Areas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Throughcare and Pre-Release</i> <i>Family Contact Development Office (FCDO)</i> <i>Visits/Reception/ Physical Education</i> 	pp21-22 p22 p22
Section 7	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Work of the Visiting Committee</i> 	p23
VC Training Record	Annex A landscape page

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

I direct this section of my Report purely to YOs.

Prison numbers are decreasing. From the average of 50 offenders reported last year, this now has decreased to some average of 35 offenders. We are concerned with the increasing number of Remand offenders however. As the offender is innocent whilst on Remand, a period of 140 days in custody can be applied which in fact means that if detained, the offender could effectively serve a custodial sentence of some 280 days or around 9 months which could be reduced by 50% to 140 days. There seems to be some inequity for this when we see the conviction rate of a Remand offender as being in cases around 30%. However, we continue to see those who are sentenced as having committed crimes as being of a violent nature involving alcohol consumption. This can reflect around 50% of the convicted offenders.

Our concerns for Prisoners in Younger ‘back cells’ were heard by HMCIP and we are pleased to report that work has been completed on the new Separation and Re-integration cells.

We are pleased to report that a new Visitors’ Centre, “The Hub” is up and running and is making a real difference to relatives travelling from some distances to visit the prison.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary has been expressed by bullet points and the issues indicated are specifically addressed in the detail of the report.

- Violent nature and crimes of prisoners now more concerning
- Toilet accommodation still not acceptable
- Home skills showing positive results
- Mental Health issues and lack of self esteem
- New Visitor Centre officially opened in August
- Lack of major Improved Capital Investment
- “Back Cells” in Younger now replaced with new Separation and Integration Unit
- Smooth transition between NHS and SPS in Health Care
- Good management in Catering and food quality
- Inequalities between Male and Female establishments
- Improvement in Education provided but Remand Prisoners issues not being addressed
- Barnardo's Plan B now in effect and more purposeful activity now available
- First Night Centre working well
- Commend work in Link Centre but concerned that First Aid Programme and Food Handling not continuing
- Need to improve on outside agencies links with Link Centre
- Concern with lack of Housing Support
- Family Centre does excellent work
- No real outside activities and Beechgrove Garden rarely used
- Concerns over number of Remand Offenders

CONCLUSION

We are proud to be part of the Cornton Vale Team.

We continue to have concerns as to the Government intentions on Visiting Committees. It is not good for morale of the volunteers although we continue to perform our role with diligence but how long this can be upheld remains to be seen.

We appreciate the efforts of HMCIP to improve matters at the Prison and thank him for meeting with us.

The Cabinet Secretary has a difficult job in allocating monies to Establishments but it would be only reasonable to expect that Funds be allocated to a short term strategy to improve conditions of the property.

I thank my colleagues for their efforts and also our Clerk for her professionalism in a part-time role.

Jim Scott, Chair
Cornton Vale Young Offenders Institution Visiting Committee

June 2014

HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Health Centre is responsible for all the primary care needs of the Young Offenders in Cornton Vale and this is provided by staff employed by Forth Valley NHS Board. In the last 12 months there have been several changes in the staff complement, e.g. one full time mental health post has been replaced by two part-time posts; a healthcare assistant and a pharmacy assistant. This should reduce complaints re access to medication. A full time alcohol counsellor is also in place. Funding has been obtained to improve services to those with a learning disability; nurse training will take place and new help leaflets produced.

The use of Focus Groups continues and the girls are encouraged to participate.

Advocacy – or the lack of it – is still an issue, but health improvement is working well.

Depression is a major concern for many prisoners and a new computer programme called, “Beating the Blues” will soon be introduced.

A dentist is available one day per week with a nurse carrying out a dental triage clinic. There is currently a three week waiting list which is acceptable. Remand prisoners are only seen if they need emergency dentistry.

The Director of Care’s Office has been moved from the Administration corridor to the Health Centre. This has the advantage of being closer to the medical and nursing staff but does mean that she has less contact with the governor and other senior staff.

The number of Young Offenders is currently low and this must have relieved some pressure on the health services.

FOOD

The kitchen currently has £2.42 a day per prisoner for all meals and allowances including tea-bags (4), sugar (4) and 250ml milk which can be used throughout the day. For this sum the kitchen is creative in its menu, which is remarkably varied. The fewer complaints received reflect that in the whole, the department is functioning well.

The menus are passed to a dietician for checking as the kitchen is constantly looking for ways to encourage healthy eating, even if this is alien to many prisoners. The introduction of more oily fish in the form of mackerel is welcomed. The request from under 21s for more salad items is being addressed. The manager focuses on seasonality so, during the summer months, this is easier to achieve as leaves etc. are more readily available. This is supplemented by produce from the garden department which is proving very successful.

Special diets are taken seriously. Rather than just relying on hearsay or dealing with particular preferences or fads, the kitchen requires a “marker” from the health centre and can then tailor the menu accordingly. Some young women need reminding that they should eat and drink more regularly and the VC can help with this.

There is a variety on the menu and a carefully balanced breakdown of costs per meals. Changes such as an introduction of pasta salad pots are fresh, colourful and are proving popular with the female population, as is a Friday evening “take” on a carry-out menu which adds variety and a “normalization” of eating.

The kitchen has, historically, always had to cope with a fluctuating population and a kitchen built for one number when another number has to be served. It has no central dining facility adjacent to the cooking area (and therefore no immediate “server”) and has not been comprehensively upgraded. It still has to rely on the heated trolleys which take food out from the kitchen to various pantries in the house blocks. This relies heavily on how the food is served and presented at the other end, and for how long it is kept warm. A common criticism is that too much food is steamed but this reflects the delivery rather than the cooking method. The kitchen is used efficiently but needs upgrading (tiling/facilities etc). This is still on the agenda but will have to be staged so that the well used facility can continue throughout the time of works. Unfortunately there is no chance of decanting in this situation.

At the time of writing this report, two young offenders are working in the kitchen. The area offers a place of learning skills, communication and self-esteem as well as providing food for the establishment. One young woman is a particularly good and mature worker. The weekend supper pack is an area that we, as a visiting committee, receive criticism. This maybe needs to be looked at further in the future but we fully appreciate that the kitchen is limited by the temperature control and storage of the items used. The kitchen staff obviously need to do some juggling to keep within budget and allow for any fluctuations. They are doing a good job whilst trying to add to and vary menus within their space, and must be congratulated on their efforts. Since the young women have been elsewhere in the decanting process it is interesting to see that they generally appreciate the menu offered.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

There is much good work within the Equality and Diversity Group that meets quarterly to discuss various issues including the type of population (and the level of support required), any complaints, impact assessments, event planning and training.

Equality and Diversity have successfully hosted International Women's Day (in conjunction with the Education Department) They focus on inspiration (in speakers, poets etc) and encouragement in order to highlight issues that may be of interest to individuals or wider groups (Women's Aid, human trafficking etc).

Refugee Week was well received and included a presentation on forced marriage and thoughts on the difficulties that some refugees have in performing everyday tasks. The food from "around the world" highlighted differences, gave topics for conversation and opened eyes!!

The Under 21 VC have kindly been invited to attend a "Strictly come Dancing" event in the gymnasium to see the short routine prepared by some of the Young Offenders. This is linked with the National Autistic Society and gives an opportunity for the young women to give to charity.

There are still gender inequalities with regard to the sanitary conditions for female young offenders within the Scottish Prison Service, who continue to be treated less favourably than their male counterparts. This is very obvious in that female YO's do not have ready access to toilets during day time lock-ups and through the night. This can prove a health issue as well as being degrading, undignified and unfair. (This situation was improved when the young women were temporarily housed in YOI Polmont) The female YO's in Cornton Vale have an unequal situation - where male YO's have ready access to showers and toilets, females still do not.

Purposeful work, education and leisure activities (both during the day and in the evening) for both remand and convicted young women must continue to be important for the SPS, rather than just relying on staff that take the lead or actively participate in events. This is helped by keeping numbers as low as possible. Nevertheless we still consider that male counterparts still have wider access to employment and leisure activities.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK

Education

Over the six months from May 2013 when the Young Offenders were in Polmont, educational opportunities were inevitably limited, although the girls were able to visit the Library regularly and classes in Literacy, Numeracy, Computing, Creative Writing and Art took place on the landing above. Sadly few of them opted to participate.

A focus group was held for the Young Offenders in Bruce House to discuss what interested them in education and to discuss what they felt the barriers were. There was almost full attendance and although only a few took an active part there was a positive discussion. It emerged that this group would prefer to attend classes specifically for Young Offenders, also that there is a difficulty in fitting education in with work and other commitments and that undertaking a Further Education course could be restricted by lack of access to the internet. They were interested to hear that elements of education could link into the Duke of Edinburgh award. There were requests for more preparation for release, for instance expanding Money Matters to include preventing and dealing with debt and also for help in qualifying for apprenticeships outside. It is encouraging to hear that Pre-release is indeed to be expanded with considerable input from the Education department – see Training section below.

Since numbers of Young Offenders have been falling it becomes increasingly difficult for the Education department to run classes specifically for them. The Art classes which took place in the block have not been reinstated since the return from Polmont although this is one of the topics being discussed in planning the move to Skye House in July. If girls are willing to enrol, New College Lanarkshire offers a wide range of classes, particularly in Literacy and Numeracy, ICT and the Expressive Arts. Practical subjects are very popular and include Story Book Mums, Life Skills (cooking) and Health for Life (in partnership with PT Instructors). In partnership with Kitchen staff, 7 students achieved an SVQ Level 1 in Food Preparation within the everyday working environment. A cooking class was introduced in Ross House and has been most successful. Subjects of more general interest are Book Group, Citizenship (which includes an element of charity fundraising – this year for Yorkhill Children’s Hospital) and Peer Tutor Training. The department’s campaign to encourage more students to take qualifications has brought encouraging results. Only one Young Offender is involved in regular education at the moment; she is doing Higher Maths and is combining this with a job in Gardens and attending Programmes.

The arts charity, Artlink Central, has obtained 3 years’ funding to carry out projects in the prison and will work in the areas of visual art, drama and dance. They have recently completed a project with the Gardens work party using recycled materials.

There have been an increasing number of extra-curricular activities this year. Writers’ and Glasgow Women’s Library (with the Gallery of Modern Art) workshops have continued, with some challenging topics such as sectarianism discussed. Glasgow School of Art placements have also continued. A Christmas workshop made and decorated 28 gingerbread houses. Some women have been doing cross stitch in their block and would like to do more.

A highlight of the year was the Create and Curate Project when a group of women working with poet Evlynn Sharp created inspiring pieces of writing based on paintings of female artists from the University of Stirling's art collection. The group also worked with curator Sarah Bromage to identify works for an exhibition launched for International Women's Day on 7th March. The resulting exhibition was really impressive and the accompanying beautiful booklet provides a lasting record. The women in this project hope to achieve the Working with Others SQA qualification level 5. This is another partnership project, this time between New College, the University of Stirling, Artlink Central and SPS funded by Education Scotland.

Summary: The Committee commends New College Lanarkshire for widening the range of educational activities it offers and particularly for its partnership with other departments within the prison and also with outside agencies.

Training and Work

The Young Offenders remained at Polmont for half the year since the Committee last reported, where they had limited access to Training and Employment. The Committee were delighted when Painting and Decorating was to be available, but sadly almost all the places were filled by Adults. Since the return to Cornton Vale the Young Offenders have been well employed and few, if any, remain in their block in working hours, in contrast to recent years.

At Cornton Vale this has again been a year of full employment, when keeping work parties fully manned has called for skilful management and flexibility. Now that Cornton Vale transfers prisoners to Grampian as well as Edinburgh and Greenock and managers cannot plan ahead how many and when, teams on work parties have to be continually changed and numbers available for work fluctuate – not good for continuity. Unavoidably, there are still many reasons why workers may be taken out of work: medical or dental appointments, education, Barnardo's rehabilitation classes in the case of Young Offenders, special projects in PE and agency visits such as Time for Change or Shine. Although it is pleasing to note that an increasing number are working to gain a qualification and care is taken to allow them to continue their courses, this reduces the number who might be able to fill gaps in the Kitchen and Laundry work parties which are essential for the running of the prison. Those in the Industrial Cleaning group have to be low-category since they have to be trusted to work in all parts of the prison without immediate supervision. Those in Ross House continue to be ineligible for work. It has been necessary recently to employ unconvicted prisoners if they are prepared to work – they cannot be compelled to do so. Tightening up of procedures and better communication mean the system seems to be working more smoothly.

Work in the Kitchen, Laundry, Industrial Cleaning and Gardens all provide qualifications and good training for future employment. Training in Hairdressing, Bike Repair and Retail in the Cosmetics Shop is to a high standard and so is also worthwhile. An increase in staff has enabled the Gardens party to double in size – not only do they keep the extensive grounds well cared-for and bright with changing displays of plants, but they also grow vegetables and herbs for the Kitchen, provide bedding plants for Care Homes in the area and make garden furniture from redundant pallets.

Young Offenders are successfully integrated with Adults in all work areas, with the exception of Industrial Cleaning, although they all have a teaching session with an Industrial Cleaner on arrival at Cornton Vale so that they know how to keep their cells clean. Because most Young Offender sentences are comparatively short and training which results in a qualification is bound to take several months, few of them are in a position to gain a qualification. What is important for the majority is to provide them with as many skills as possible to create a life outside which will reduce the risk of their reoffending.

In this connection the Committee is delighted that more attention is to be paid to Throughcare and Pre-release by bringing it into the remit of Training and Work. The proposal to set up a Pre-release work party as part of Throughcare is an encouraging innovation. The present Pre-release course will be expanded to include Life Skills (cooking) and Painting and Decorating as well as the existing topics of Money Matters, Universal Credit, First Steps, Housing and Job Centre. Several components will be provided by the Learning Centre but the courses will be run and paid for as a work party with compulsory attendance.

Summary: the Committee welcomes the increasing co-operation between departments indicated by the introduction of a Pre-release work party.

RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

Cornton Vale has had, long overdue, upgrades to the residential accommodation with the Young Offenders being decanted to Polmont in order that the refurbishment could be carried out.

The first night in custody suite remains within Ross House. Occasionally YOs are accommodated within Ross or the annexe Dumyat House if there are particular needs, bullying problems or mental health issues.

The units have been cosmetically improved. Whilst we have had mixed opinions about some changes of materials (carpet on the floor etc.), it has given a more domestic feel, improves the noise level and is so far standing up to the hard knocks of the establishment. The winter season will be a good indicator of ease of maintenance and materials being fit for purpose.

Skye house is still not functioning as a centre for YOs which has been a disappointment and frustrating. We look forward to it being a more identifiable base in the not too distant future. Low numbers have meant that young women have had their own space (rather than being routinely doubled up) but still have no in-cell sanitation.

The residential accommodation is much more presentable and maintaining cleanliness will help keep the improved look.

PRISON ESTATE

This report straddles the decanting of the YOs to Polmont and their return to Cornton Vale. We note that this move was handled very well by the staff.

The Separation and Re-integration Unit (Dumyat), attached to Ross House has remained open and is used as a space to separate young women from their peers if necessary. The Unit has proved a useful space and is only used as a last resort if an alternative is the only option, which unfortunately it has to be at times.

The gym has been modernized and whilst the outdoor areas are still under used the garden is developing very well. Poly-tunnels grow vegetables and herbs etc. that can be put to good use in the kitchen. The calibre of garden staff is excellent and it shows throughout the whole estate in terms of planters, landscaping, recycling and food provision. It also improves links with the wider community and is offering an opportunity for YOs to learn new skills.

The whole estate is looking much better – it has been painted, repaired and upgraded and whilst there has been no new building work there has been the addition of extra classrooms next to the education space. There has also been much work carried out at the entrance in order to improve the security system. This in turn has improved the look at the front door zone.

There is still a plan to return the Young Offenders to their own House block – Skye. This should improve the sense of identity and ownership together with the chance to increase activities and programmes. The upgrading has still meant that there is no in-cell sanitation to some blocks, no formal art department, limited dining facilities (food still travelling on trolleys) and poor staff facilities. The next report will be able to give greater detail on the entrance area, completion of the upgrading and Skye House.

It is worth noting that members of the community outside Cornton Vale have commented on the improved appearance and of how the Prison sits within the landscape and surrounding buildings.

THE FAMILY HELP HUB

While technically not within our remit the Visiting Committee wishes to include the Help Hub within this report as it has made such a major difference to the work of the YOI.

For many years the committee has bemoaned the lack of a visitor centre at Cornton Vale; it now congratulates the team that has created the Family Help Hub in an ideal existing building that was underused. This has taken the pressure off space elsewhere.

Very many adults and approximately 180 children have accessed the Help Hub and the project has exceeded its target of visitors. The centre provides extensive emotional and practical support to individuals and families as well as providing everyday facilities such as a cup of tea, WCs and a place to sit down, wait and gather information.

The Hub is run by paid staff, SPS workers and a large number of trained volunteers. Consultations are carried out, with over 90% of respondents agreeing that the Family Help Hub is useful as a place to go before and after visits and to see a friendly face.

The link with external agencies has proved successful in providing a wide range of services in the centre. Importantly it has also increased links with the community.

The Visiting Committee wishes to thank everyone that has been involved in the Family Help Hub. The centre is proving a great facility and highlights the need for the “normalization” of the process. The Centre has contributed to an increase of children visiting the prison and increases the chance of families staying together.

LINK CENTRE AND INDUCTION

During the refurbishment programme at Cornton Vale last summer, while some induction was still undertaken at Cornton Vale, Link Centre staff were based at Polmont in order to maintain as far as practicable pre-release procedures and support. This seemed to work well and there were no particular issues raised by the girls.

The Link Centre provides induction programmes over the first few weeks for all convicted women and girls. Given the relatively low numbers involved it is not practical to provide separate modules for the Young Offenders so programmes are attended jointly. The induction package remains unaltered since last year but the National Induction process has been under review and a new 5-day Induction Programme will be introduced in the near future.

The programmes provide essential information on life in Cornton Vale. This is delivered in two modules which provide core screening on matters such as social security benefits, housing, health & safety, visits, bullying, race relations and complaints. Support is offered for those who have experienced sexual abuse and drug issues. There are also sessions on family contact and Home Detention Curfew (HDC). Opportunities in education are also covered, together with a health assessment and induction for use of the Gym and basic first aid and food handling. Job interviews take place in the Link Centre every week, when every prisoner who is eligible will be allocated a work party.

The Link Centre also co-ordinates sentence management and provides a central location for support services which include addiction support, housing and social charities to help women to return to and successfully integrate into their communities.

The Centre provides pre-release sessions undertaking housing and benefits assessments and liaises with the partner organisations who work with Cornton Vale to manage the throughcare for all girls on release. Two Throughcare officers have recently been appointed. They will be based elsewhere in the prison but the Link Centre staff will continue to liaise with the Housing and Job Centre elements of the Pre-release course. Other partners include SACRO and Cornerstone. The only partner organisation new to the prison this year is Shine, which provides mentoring to prisoners before and for a minimum of 6 months after release, a most welcome adjunct to Throughcare. The Social Work department is also located in the Link Centre.

‘Time for Change’, a programme specifically tailored to the needs of 16 and 17 year olds, continues to offer intensive support for girls preparing for release. Other agencies still providing support include Open Secret, Circle, Job Centre, 218 (Glasgow) and Caledonia Youth.

Housing continues to be a huge issue for the girls and has always had a significant part in the function of the Link Centre. Two housing officers currently attend the prison to deal with housing, although the officer covering Glasgow visits only once a fortnight. Link Centre staff are keen to source other means of housing support.

The Link Centre is a very busy place – two members of staff do a remarkable job in co-ordinating all the different things going on. In addition to induction classes, employment, social work, Family Contact and Equality and Diversity interviews, so many partner organisations now visit Cornton Vale that there is a real problem in providing enough office and meeting space.

This has been a problem for some time but is becoming increasingly serious. When a tiny table with a chair either side has to be used in the main waiting area with no privacy and noisy coming and going all round, an answer has to be found.

***Summary:* The Committee commends the work of the staff in the Link Centre for the smooth running of a complex schedule.**

Area of concern: measures should be taken as soon as possible so that all interviews can be conducted in quiet and privacy.

OTHER AREAS OF THE PRISON REGIME ON WHICH THE VISITING COMMITTEE HAS ISSUES TO REPORT

STAFFING

The Staff who are involved with Young Offenders have done particularly well over the last year. During that time there was the move to Polmont, the return to Cornton Vale and the uncertainty of Skye Unit not being completed timeously and Staff and Offenders alike being moved between Younger and Bruce. Clearly such movement within such a short time caused some disquiet and unsettled all concerned. However, Management and Staff coped well and there were no incidents of note and the YOs have now moved back to the refurbished Unit at Skye at the time of writing this Report and everyone appears to have settled into the new Block.

We appreciate the communication between Staff and VC. This gives us the opportunity to understand issues which are sometimes below the surface and gives us greater insight into offsetting any complaints from or between Prisoners and Staff which can be dealt with simply and quickly without getting out of hand. It is interesting to note that the Staff and Prisoners much prefer this simple approach of resolution of potential issues to that of form filling.

We are pleased to see that the Staff with particular aptitude in dealing with YOs continue to work in the YO Block. It requires a different approach to that in dealing with the Adult population and this is clearly reflected in the quality of communication within the Unit.

The falling numbers in the Unit are now enabling the Staff to spend more time in "listening" and this is reflected in the atmosphere within the Unit and also there appear to be fewer incidents occurring.

We believe that the Staff and Management have a much improved attitude to their sometime very difficult choices between discipline and rehabilitation and we support their efforts totally which appear to be creating a much happier and workable environment.

SPECIALIST AREAS

Throughcare and Pre-release

For the last three years Throughcare for the Young Offenders has been in the hands of Barnardo's Plan B, a partnership approach to meeting the needs of the young people in custody aiming to take account of their individual needs whilst in prison and on their return to the community. This contract has ended and the function of Plan B will now be undertaken by prison staff, although Barnardo's youth workers will still be running discussion sessions and occasional events as part of rehabilitation. The recent encouraging recognition of the value of effective throughcare is demonstrated in the appointment of two Throughcare Officers whose job it will be to co-ordinate pre-release, and Plan B in the case of Young Offenders, with outside agencies throughout Scotland.

At last Throughcare and Pre-release courses are being seen as increasingly important in helping to reduce reoffending. Young Offenders tell members of the Committee regularly that they are worried that they will not be able to resist reoffending when they are trying to cope outside and that they want more support, although it is accepted that Young Offenders do not always take advantage of what is offered. This is why it is such good news that an organisation such as 'Shine', a women's mentoring service, is now working at Cornton Vale.

With lower numbers of Young Offenders in the prison it has been decided that the responsibility for Plan B can be taken over by Personal Officers, who will have special training and be relieved of some routine duties in the block to be able to give enough time to the task. This is a big change in an important area and there must be concerns as to how prison officers can be expected to take over the job of a nation-wide charity such as Barnardo's which has built up contacts and relationships with other agencies over some time. Concerns have also been expressed as to whether Young Offenders will respond as well to a uniformed officer as to a youth worker from outside the prison.

The proposal to set up a Pre-release work party which will cover a wider range of topics (see Training and Work above) is an encouraging innovation which gives prisoners an opportunity to leave Cornton Vale with a wider range of skills with which to tackle life outside.

Summary: the Committee commends the thinking behind the organisational review with regard to Throughcare, but awaits its implementation with some anxiety.

Family Contact Development Office (FCDO)

This office continues to cover a full range of services helping prisoners to maintain links with family. They see all women soon after arrival to help with contacting families and to provide information for families, who are invited to attend a family induction session. They operate an “e-mail a prisoner” service by which families can send a message to their family member in custody. They organise children’s visits which take place three times a week in the Visits area and are very well used by prisoners.

They continue to offer an enhanced visits facility known as “Little Cherubs” which provides unsupervised quality time for mothers and children or for a special circumstances family visit when there is a bereavement. They contribute to the ICM process. They are welcoming and provide a listening ear whatever the pressure on their time.

As last year, they organised a Family Day for Young Offenders. In spite of there being lower numbers in the unit a considerably larger number of families came and the event was much enjoyed and appreciated.

Summary: the Committee continues to commend all aspects of FCDO work.

Visits

The lay-out of the Visits area remains the same but the visitor experience is changing. The long-awaited opening of a Visitor Centre, The Hub, run by a local voluntary organisation, has made Cornton Vale a more welcoming place particularly for families. The mere fact that they have somewhere to go before and after their visit where they can find shelter, toilet facilities and have a cup of tea made for them is likely to reduce the stress of a prison visit.

Reception

This area runs smoothly and efficiently with the continuing help of an Administrative Officer between 3 and 9 pm every day and the Court Desk Officer. The only cause for concern is the extra work involved in receiving prisoners from Edinburgh and now Grampian for one night before going to Court, sometimes at weekly intervals. Prisoners have to go through the Reception and Release procedures and are unsettled by it – is it really necessary for prisoners to come back to Cornton Vale for just one night?

Physical Education

In spite of the efforts of the PEIs to interest them in physical activity, recent groups of Young Offenders have not been so motivated to go to the Gym. There are fewer of them, but another reason could be that since there is now full employment in the prison they spend less time in the blocks with nothing to do and have less surplus energy to work off. On the other hand, for those on remand, a trip to the gym is a welcome opportunity to leave their block.

There are plans to introduce some outside activities such as a walking group and rounders during the summer.

Section 7

THE WORK OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

Visiting Committee Statistics		
	2012/2013	2013/2014
Recommended complement of VC members (per Rule 155)	7	7
Number of VC members at start of the reporting period	7	7
Number of VC members at end of the reporting period	7	6
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	nil	1
Number of VC members leaving within the reporting period	nil	2
Total number of VC committee meetings during reporting period	6	6
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	7	7
Total number of applications/complaints received		
<p>(Note: any issues are dealt with on the spot with Officers or, if necessary with the Governor and answer transmitted to the Prisoner immediately. There is no requirement for voluminous paper work and this works well. Approx 200 such concerns pa are dealt with in this sensible manner.)</p>		
Total number of visits to the prison* incl stat, events, meetings see table below		137

Total number of visits to the establishment or meetings connected therewith April 2013 – March 2014

VC member	Stat Visits & Prison Events	VC Meetings	Visits to Other Jails	AVC Business	Conferences	Training	Summary
Jim Scott Chair	11	3	0	8	2	3	27
Julie McEachern Vice Chair	12 Events 3	6	2	1	1 +(AGM SICJ) 1	3	25) 29 4)
Mirren Begbie res	5	2				3	10
Alastair Howie new	2	2					4
Penny Johnston	14 Events 1	6	1		1	3	25) 26 1)
Jan Nicholson res	7	3				3	13
Christine Grant	5	5			1	3	14
Anne Montgomery	6	4			1	3	14
Total for group	66	31	3	9	7	21	137

Note: any issues are dealt with on the spot with Officers or, if necessary with the Governor and answer transmitted to the Prisoner immediately. There is no requirement for voluminous paper work and this works well. (Approx 200 such concerns pa are dealt with in this sensible manner.)

This table not applicable, see statement above

Applications/Complaints Statistics		
Subject	2012/2013	2013/2014
Accommodation		
Diversity related		
Education/training/work		
Estate issues (conditions)		
Family/visits		
Food		
Health related		
Inter-establishment transfers		
Personal property		
Staff/Prisoner related		
Miscellaneous		
Total		

**VISITING COMMITTEE TRAINING RECORD
HMP & YOI INSTITUTION CORNTON VALE (Annex A)**

MEMBER'S NAME	VC TRAINING DELIVERED LOCALLY								NATIONAL TRAINING (AVC)			
	Induction (date)	Tour (date)	Expenses	Rotas	Interviews	Requests/ Complaints	Minute Book	Other (State)	FC/1	CD/1	Chair/ Vice Ch.	Annual Conference
J McEachern, Anne Montgomery												Conf 2013 members
Jim Scott												Tutor
												Training Foundation Course for Visiting Committees
												National Training AVC
												Experienced Members Training
** Members with 3 years' service or more are not required to do VC Induction training though they should still do SPS Induction**												

MEMBER'S NAME	SPS TRAINING DELIVERED LOCALLY					
	Course Date	Course Name (Tutor)				
Alastair Howie (new Oct 2013)	March 2014	PPT				