



**ANNUAL REPORT
2011-2012**

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

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

James Scott	Chairman
Julie McEachern	Vice-Chairman
Mirren Begbie	
Christine Grant J.P.	
Penny Johnston	
Anne Montgomery J.P.	
Jan Nicholson	
Myra Christie	Clerk

Section 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;
- 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.

We have seven members on our Committee and it is my first wish to thank my colleagues for the dedication they have shown in carrying out their duties over the past year.

This has been a difficult year in as much that in December 2011 the Cabinet Secretary announced that he wished to abolish Visiting Committees and replace them with an Advocacy Service. Despite that announcement, my colleagues have worked in their normal enthusiastic fashion and have maintained the reputation of the YOI Visiting Committee. Visiting figures are shown later in the Report.

The Committee members continue to maintain their excellent level of attendance and if it were not for illness would have achieved yet again a 100% record for attendance at Meetings, yet still achieving a 90% Meeting presence.

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 visiting the establishment three times in one week 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. We also invite representatives from other bodies to address us, such as The Faith Groups and CJA.

Our role is very clearly defined as monitoring and we have no authority to inspect and in this direction I thank HMCIP for inviting us to sit with him prior to his Inspection Report Preparation so that he can be aware of concerns we have had.

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Section 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

I direct this section of my Report purely to YOs.

There continues to be on average 50 offenders, many of whom are on Remand. It has been concerning to note the increase of crimes of a violent nature which, despite tagging, still retain the high numbers in custody.

We are concerned that YOs have serious literacy issues and also in conversation they find it difficult to express themselves in a coherent fashion.

The YO accommodation is now in a repainted Younger House but the same issues still apply in that work placement is underfunded and boredom and laziness are still prevalent, despite best efforts of Staff to engender some enthusiasm.

The toilet accommodation has not improved. Efforts have been made to replace some soft furnishings but the general ambience is no different. However, waiting time has improved greatly.

Efforts are being made continuously by Staff to improve Life Skills and this has also assisted in some prisoners responding but the ability of YOs to 'let off steam' has still not been resolved.

In Ross House where the Adult Population and YOs mix it gives cause for concern to see Mental Issues being played out in front of a YO. We are delighted to see that the Back Cells are being replaced in Ross.

The Report on Women Offenders commissioned last year and published this year replicates the majority of concerns we as a Committee have and, when coupled with the Reports of HMCIP, we can only hope that the lot of female offenders can be properly addressed.

Our concerns for Prisoners in Younger back cells were heard by HMCIP and we are pleased to report that work has almost been completed in the refurbishment of the Strong Cells.

We still have no Visitors' Centre and this was addressed in the Report of HMCIP and we aware of financial restrictions, but this Establishment being the National Prison for YOs, really, this should be addressed, at least in the short term.

Section 4

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
- Visitor Centre not progressed
- Lack of major Capital Investment
- Back Cells in Ross being rebuilt
- 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
- Good progress made in Mother and Baby Unit
- Family Centre does excellent work
- No real outside activities and Beechgrove Garden rarely used

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.

James H Scott (Chairman)
Cornton Vale Young Offenders Institution Visiting Committee

June 2012

Section 5

HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The transition of health care provision from the SPS to Forth Valley NHS Health Board passed off smoothly on 1st November 2011. The Young Offenders should have noticed no change in either the personnel giving the care or in the standard of care provided.

The 'Better Health, Better Lives for Prisoners' strategy document is due to be launched on 14th June. Again we eagerly await its recommendations and hope that sufficient funding will be available to implement them.

In the past 12 months:

- With the transfer of a significant number of adult women prisoners to Edinburgh pressure on the methadone delivery programme has been reduced. There are now "only" 72 on methadone as opposed to 142 last year. This means a lot less congestion in the waiting room area which has also been improved by the employment of an extra discipline officer.
- There was a brief concern over provision of dentistry services - for a short time only emergencies could be dealt with - but normal service has now resumed. A permanent dentist provides 2/3 sessions per week. The current waiting time for a routine appointment is now an acceptable 6 weeks.
- The funding request for additional capacity at the Health Centre was turned down but Darline Reekie and her team have got around this by making more efficient use of the rooms available and by ensuring visiting specialists come when clinical rooms are free.
- There is still a shortage of counselling service provision - especially for bereavement counselling. Cruise were approached but were unable to commit.
- Staff have concerns re appropriateness of Cornton Vale as a place to detain and treat Young Offenders with serious mental health issues. The NHS staff see a conflict between the care/containment roles. This is an issue which the Visiting Committee has raised many times.
- There are currently 2 vacancies in the Mental Health team. The good news is that there were 36 applicants for these posts. Interviews are being held shortly.

Ms Reekie is to be congratulated on her appointment as Director of Care and we wish her well in this role.

Addictions

When on 1st November 2011 Healthcare at Cornton Vale was transferred to the NHS, the NHS took over the work of Phoenix Futures and the provision of addiction services in the prison. All women serving 2 years or over are offered the Generic Assessment tool to identify which programmes may be most relevant to their needs. Those most likely to be helpful to YO's are concerned with alcohol awareness, low self-esteem, relationships and female offending behaviour.

Phoenix Futures are pleased with recent initiatives. It is helpful that a doctor now attends weekly case conferences. Phoenix caseworkers are now able to undertake group work, e.g. on health promotion and alcohol education. They are also piloting a 12-week Peer Mentoring course. YO's are taking part in both groups.

For those at risk of drug overdosing Naloxone training is given prior to release and/or court attendance. This training is provided by Phoenix Futures alongside CPR by an addictions nurse. Once trained, Naloxone is put into the prisoner's "valuable property" bag for their personal use if required.

The Scottish Prison Service remains responsible for SPS addictions policy, deals with deterrence and ensures that prisoners receive the necessary addictions and intervention services. The Addictions Manager is responsible for implementing and co-ordinating the SPS policy and Memorandum of Understanding, working with the NHS, Security and Education who deliver Programmes. She also covers the Care Orderly Room, the Integrated Treatment Care Process and links with drug and alcohol partnerships outside.

Programmes in addressing behaviour and offending, play an important part in rehabilitation. It is a pity that there is not enough time for those on short sentences to take advantage of what they offer. Those who do not qualify for Programmes can attend Approved Programmes. These do not address offending to the same depth but can be helpful.

Summary: Because of careful planning beforehand by both Healthcare and SPS staff the reorganisation went smoothly and is working well - to the extent that prisoners have been unaware of the change.

FOOD

Kitchen

Last summer problems arose when departures for Edinburgh diminished the number of experienced workers in the Kitchen. Since it is vital to the running of the prison to have the Kitchen work party at full strength, it is now accepted that experienced workers will not be taken away. YOs allocated to working in the Kitchen usually do the job well.

The food budget was raised from £2 to £2.09 this year. This was not enough to cover the considerable rise in food prices nationally over the last year. The skills and imagination of Kitchen Managers were challenged to provide the same high level of tasty and nourishing meals. Strict portion control has helped. In addition, the supply of fresh herbs, salads and unusual vegetables from the Garden's poly-tunnel has provided healthy food and interesting new flavours. There was a 3-month wait for a new soup boiler which had to be brought in from abroad – we welcomed the return of the superb quality vegetable soup. We are disappointed that only about half of YOs take soup, which means that they have a smaller, less nourishing lunch than they could have, but that is their choice.

Pregnant women continue to be entitled to a pint of milk a day, their pregnancy status having to be confirmed by the Health Centre and the Kitchen informed. They are also entitled to extra fruit. At the moment no special diets are provided as there is no demand. Good value fruit bags are still available at subsidised rates thanks to ongoing funding from the Robertson Trust.

The Catering Committee continues to meet quarterly to discuss menus, problems and complaints and included representatives from the residential houses. Members of the Visiting Committee have been pleased to see Catering Committee reports displayed in the dining room and impressed by the quality of the comments. We receive few complaints about the food, the most common being the length of time it spends in the heated trolleys and the early hour at which supper is served, leaving a very long gap between the evening meal and breakfast the next morning.

Summary: meals are an important event in the day of a prisoner – the Kitchen staff are to be congratulated on providing such good dishes day after day on time and for so many.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The YO's have had no issues regarding Diversity over the last year however the **gender inequalities** with regard to the care of and conditions for female YO's within the Scottish Prison Service are very apparent in several areas and continue to cause concern.

- As reported in some detail in last year's Annual Report and the previous year's Annual Report, the female YO's continue to be treated less favourably than their male counterparts in the YOI Polmont with regards to in-cell sanitation. The female YO's do not have ready access to toilets during daytime lockups and through the night. On many occasions, YO's have complained about the unfairness, discomfort and indignity suffered through delays in getting to toilets as they are locked in until they are electronically released. The time delay from first requesting access to the toilet can be several hours. This is a serious health issue as well as being degrading treatment. This situation is unacceptable and can be solved by the Scottish Prison Service as it has been possible to fit in-cell sanitation into much older prisons for males in recent years.
- The lack of purposeful activities - daytime and evening activities - for female YO's (both on remand and convicted) is another inequality which needs to be attended to by the Scottish Prison Service. Their male counterparts have wider access to a range of activities. The female prisoners have complained frequently to VC members about boredom and their leisure time could be more productive if the YO's were involved in planned physical and mental pursuits, i.e. activities in each block led by officers or youth workers.

Since the involvement of Barnardo's workers during this year, there has been a slight improvement in meaningful daytime activities, but this requires further development and assurance of maintenance when the project ceases. Chatting and watching television remain the main pastimes in the evening. Activities in the evening should be developed and available as they are for the male YO's.

- The poor conditions within the cells for female YO's is apparent when compared with the standard of accommodation which male YO's have at Polmont. The run down appearance of the decor and furnishings make it a dismal environment for the female YO's which contrast with the excellent, modern facilities which the male YO's live in.

Summary: (i) the Committee continues to have serious concerns about the gender inequalities experienced by female YO's within YOI Cornton Vale.

(ii) the Committee recommends that the Scottish Prison Service corrects these inequalities which demonstrate poor care and support for female YO's in comparison to the current experience of male YO's.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK

Education

Since the Committee reported last year when the number of Young Offenders participating in education was increasing, there has been a further improvement. There is a weekly 'welcome session' for those who want to find out what is on offer. The two classes which provide specifically for Young Offenders, Life Skills and Art, are both very popular and high standards are achieved. The Life Skills cookery course lasts for 16 weeks, work is evaluated at every stage and successful students earn an SVQ certificate. This is good preparation for their life outside whether or not they use the qualification and everyone was delighted when one YO gained a place in catering college. A bakery course has recently been introduced which is open to all and is also in great demand. The short Money Matters course which is part of the Pre-release programme now includes basic cooking in the form of planning, budgeting and preparation of a day's meals - a welcome and practical addition.

The weekly art class which takes place in Younger House was introduced last summer and fulfils a different but equally valuable need. Water-colour painting is new to most of those in the class – all get something out of it and one or two are really talented. In the autumn members of the Young Offenders Art Class were invited to help curate the annual national Koestler exhibition of prisoners' art held at the Tramway in Glasgow – a wonderful opportunity. Sadly, no way could be found for the girls to visit the exhibition, although a small number of the entries were shown later at the St Margaret Centre at Cornton Vale. No one from the prison won an award but the students are not discouraged and four Young Offenders will submit entries this year. Accreditation for this course is being applied for.

The card-making class for YOs which was set up by the Education department to provide occupation for those on short sentences, has ceased, full employment in the prison having reduced the need for it, but author visits have continued this year in Younger House and a drama class is planned for the near future, also to take place there. A small number of young women join Adult classes in such subjects as English and Maths as a continuation of school work. Some also follow up interests such as computing, history or film studies and Young Offenders took part in the citizenship project which included links with Malawi.

The unconvicted still have very little to occupy them, although a weekly Letter-writing and IT class was introduced last summer when Motherwell College took over provision of education at Cornton Vale.

***Summary:* The Committee commends the more focussed efforts made this year to cater for the needs and preferences of the Young Offenders.**

Training and Work

This time last year overcrowding meant that there were not enough places to provide work for all those eligible and although many jobs had been created we still saw young women hanging about the block during the day. This year the picture is different. Two of the larger groups – those in Ross House and the unconvicted – are not eligible for work. The allocation of prisoners to Edinburgh regularly depletes work parties to the extent that it is now difficult to fill some work places. The need to keep the Kitchen and Laundry fully staffed is essential for the running of the prison, thus reducing the numbers available for jobs elsewhere. In addition Young Offenders may be taken from their work parties for a Barnardo's course, which should take priority as an important part of their rehabilitation.

All the work opportunities in place last summer remain: kitchen, laundry, industrial cleaning, hairdressing, gardens, bike shop, cosmetics shop and card-making workshop. Young Offenders are integrated with adults in all these areas. Most offer a qualification. Block housekeeping and pantry jobs are filled by those on short sentences.

Hairdressing: the tutor is absent for some months due to ill health but Hairdressing is considered so important both in the training it offers and its interaction with the community that priority is being given to finding cover.

Gardens: the Gardens party has been particularly affected by the depletion in the workforce, a great pity when the reintroduction of gardening in the prison has been so successful. The officer in charge is now trained to assess students, the poly-tunnel is full of vegetables to be used in the Kitchen, new beds are being planted and any surplus bedding plants are to be given to a local Care Home.

Bike shop: workers allocated to the shop can be withdrawn at short notice for perfectly bona fide reasons, which makes the workload difficult to manage.

Cosmetics shop: this goes from strength to strength with an increased range of stock and sales.

A dilemma has developed in the use of Young Offenders' time. Rehabilitation, in the form of work, Barnardo's courses and education all compete for the morning and afternoon sessions. There are also one-off extras such as PE courses. It is desirable that young women should learn the disciplines of regular work so it is a pity if they are prevented from attending regularly. To resolve this problem an Activities Review Meeting has been set up to look at the overall programme for the year and to make agreements so that activities do not clash. A schedule set up in the Training and Work office is updated each week and shows what everyone is doing. Work is in progress to draw up a structured time-table for activities in Younger House.

Summary: the Committee is delighted that so much more purposeful activity is now available to Young Offenders but would urge that a full time-table for these activities should be completed as soon as possible to avoid the risk of frustration and confusion.

RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

Unfortunately there have been few real changes since our last report. The first night custody suite was created within Ross House and despite some teething problems seems to be working within the block. Occasionally young women stay longer in Ross House for closer observation, mental health issues and specialist care. This house physically looks much the same as it did last year but the Committee awaits the arrival of the new "Separation and Re-integration Unit" (due to be used in June 2012). This will offer 6 more appropriate rooms instead of the old "management suite". We have noticed that, as a rule, fewer young women are kept for long periods in Ross House, those being held there for specific care or particular bullying issues etc, but as soon as possible they are moved on to the YO unit. The building itself is probably getting near to the stage where it will need more attention in terms of roof repairs, glazing, cleaning etc.

The majority of young women (Under 21) are now held in Younger House (remand and convicted), the aim being to house this age group together. Occasionally they go to Wallace, Skye or the ILUs but these remain the exception. It is sad that the Younger building type does not really lend itself to creating a centre for the Young Offenders and is hard to manage, but the units have had to be used as best as possible. A concerted effort has also been made to use single cells rather than doubling or even using a cell for three persons (this obviously varies if the numbers are high). Despite the fact that some women want the company of a "co-pilot" it has meant that the women have their own space to retreat to.

Unfortunately the Younger building remains in poor condition and has to meet demands that it was not designed for. It has no focus, **still has no in-cell sanitation** and continues to have no major investment. Once again the building has had the minimum of maintenance to keep it going but there has been no modernisation or extension work. Minor works, including replacement shower curtains and some interior decoration have been carried out but everyone agrees that the blocks "contain" people rather than offering an opportunity to improve situations.

Internally the social spaces look better and have had a welcome degree of decoration and personalisation. The pool and table tennis tables are long overdue and are apparently being used well. This is very much aided by staff who are both encouraging and join in with the young women for competitions etc. This joint participation should be actively encouraged as it makes a real difference to damaged lives. The state of cleanliness (or otherwise) also has an impact on the spaces. If the blocks are not to be replaced in the immediate future a consistent and thorough cleaning regime is needed.

PRISON ESTATE

No major building projects have been carried out at Cornton Vale this report time. Some additional equipment has been added and minor alterations have been made to paths for safety reasons but nothing major has been prioritised. There have been “improvements” to the Younger “back cells” but these are seemingly used to almost constantly house the most troubled of young people. Work has also begun on the Separation and Re-integration unit attached to Ross House which will offer 6 new cells (under and over 21) and the Committee looks forward to a visit to the new unit to see how it will work.

Staff are constantly relied upon to make the best of what is available and even though there seems to be less overcrowding, especially helped by some women being moved to other prisons, the estate is long overdue for modernisation or preferably re-built to more current standards. The gym is popular but is not being developed and a year on there is still no designated outdoor games area, with suitable fencing etc. so that ball games etc. can be held outside. In fact, any outdoor facilities seem to have come to a halt. This may also be due to lack of training for the staff, in terms of outdoor games etc. Cornton Vale has plenty of outdoor garden space around the buildings which has been spectacularly under used. No young women seem to use the Beechgrove garden regularly and nothing seems to be done outside except a repeat of what is done inside (smoking, chatting and sitting around). Other outdoor skills should be developed and encouraged.

There is still a limitation on space in the entrance, reception area and the visits room. The card-making workshop and shop are popular but the hairdressing space, usually a great flagship for the Prison, has had more limited use this year due to staffing problems.

The kitchen space continues to serve the prison but still has no central dining facilities and it would appear none are planned for the future. Because of the service on kitchen trolleys to poorly equipped and poorly cleaned and maintained pantries, the food is never at its best however it leaves the kitchen.

It is good that in addition to the education area and the library, more programmes and activities are being run in the house block. This makes the house seem livelier than the last time we reported. There is still scope for more events to take place in the evening and at weekends within the space available in Younger.

A year on and despite there being an under-used building within the Prison Estate, there is still no Visitor Centre at Cornton Vale. As mentioned in our last report a Visitor Centre could have been an ideal interface with the community and be a great information centre as well as the place for visitors to gather themselves or have a ‘cuppa’ prior to their prison visit. It never ceases to amaze the Committee how far some people need to travel (often with children) only to find that there are no real facilities when they get to Cornton Vale. It would seem that as a society we are willing to punish the family as well as the Young Offender.

LINK CENTRE AND INDUCTION

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 by adult women and girls.

The programmes provide essential information on life in Cornton Vale. This was previously provided in three modules however, due to lack of funding; only two modules are now delivered with key issues from the third module now being incorporated into modules one and two. The programmes have been updated this year to incorporate the recent changes to the rules and the new complaints procedures.

Modules 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 will also be sessions on family contact and Home Detention Curfew (HDC).

First aid and food handling is also covered, however, following the loss of Module 3, these are **no longer certificated** and only basic coverage is provided. Sessions are also provided on education and a health assessment and induction for use of the gymnasium. Girls will also be allocated a job placement, which may be on a shared basis if there are not enough full placements available.

The Link Centre also coordinates sentence management and provides a central location for support services which include addiction support, housing and social workers to help women to return to and successfully reintegrate into their communities. The Centre provides pre-release sessions undertaking housing* and benefit assessments and liaises with the partner organisations who work with Cornton Vale to manage the throughcare for all girls on release. Partners include SACRO and Phoenix.

The 'Time for Change' programme introduced last year specifically tailored to the needs of 16 and 17 year olds is now coordinated with 'Plan B' and continues to provide intensive support to enable girls to move on following release from Cornton Vale. 'Routes out of Prison' programmes offered by the Wise group can provide support to help girls back into work (They will often also provide emotional support). Other agencies also providing support include Open Secret; Circle; Job Centre; 218; and Caledonian Youth.

*Housing is a huge issue for the girls and it is **one of the 9 offender outcomes**. The Link Centre has always provided support on this key issue particularly pre-release, however, again due to cuts in funding, only Edinburgh and some parts of Glasgow Housing are now represented through the Link Centre. A list of all local housing agencies is now provided to the residential blocks where the girls must coordinate contact themselves. Wallace block has a dedicated staff member who does referrals however this is not the case in other blocks where prisoners have to rely on the managers and staff availability and support.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- **The work of staff in the Link Centre for the efficient and smooth running of the Induction programmes and the maintenance of a pleasant and welcoming environment for the women and agencies using the Link Centre.**

Areas of concern:

- **The loss of certified programmes in first aid and food handling**
- **The reduction in housing support – this is critical given that housing is one of the 9 key offender outcomes.**

Section 6

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

Induction - See above – we have included this in the Link Centre heading

STAFFING

We have historically highlighted problems with staffing at Cornton Vale (shortages, long term sickness etc). We do however acknowledge that many staff continue to endeavour to maintain standards with ever ageing buildings, facilities and budget restraints. We are concerned that as time goes on the wealth of experience may be diminished and that operational staff will be employed without having the necessary skills that come with length of service.

We have always considered that consistent staffing is crucial to improving the regime (including cleanliness both inside and out) but that the **constant** change of staffing leaves uncertainty and unfinished projects. No-one ever seems to stay long enough at Cornton Vale for real change to happen, and to be seen by others, to be happening. Sentence types and lengths also play a part in the lack of ownership which staff, and some women prisoners, have to battle with constantly.

Having managers within the house blocks, who are willing to support the development of activities, has made a real difference. Ideas, such as, books within the block, indoor games and especially programmes, should be developed further. A more efficient **time-table** should be created between work, houses, regimes and leisure activities as well as the programmes that are now being more successfully provided by outside organisations such as Barnardo's/Plan B. This would make best use of staff time which is still limited. It is a real shame that young women have to make choices in the morning only to find that nothing else happens that day. Boredom only ever leads to problems. It is also unfortunate that the need to earn money can put women off participating in other group work or activities and that much still relies on the staff available. It is seen as a very positive step by the Committee that dedicated Youth Workers are organising events and programmes for the young women. A dedicated space for creative arts would be welcomed.

The staff who work with the young offenders are in the main very good and this should be valued, developed and further encouraged. Often staff have very valid points to make and their on-going training, their opinions and most importantly communication with them is as essential as ever.

SPECIALIST AREAS

Plan B

Plan B is run at Cornton Vale by two Barnardo's Youth Workers to provide a structured and co-ordinated framework of support for Young Offenders in preparation for release. It aims to engage a wide range of partners who deliver services to young people. After a slow start when only one worker was in place and when only a few YOs could be offered this support towards the end of their sentence, the scheme is now well established and looks after all those sentenced from 4 months to 4 years. Individual needs are assessed soon after a young woman comes into prison and an outcome plan is agreed, part of which may start in prison. Each has a record of progress. Plan B provides a good opportunity for these young people to talk through the wide range of difficulties they may encounter when they leave prison, on a one-to-one basis with a Youth Worker who is able to set up contacts for them.

Although by no means all will have the strength of purpose to take full advantage of the support plan set up for them it appears that a lower number of YOs have returned to prison after they have taken part in the scheme.

***Summary:* this is an excellent and long overdue initiative which can make a considerable contribution towards rehabilitation.**

Family Contact Development Office (FCDO)

The staffing in this office has been reduced from 3 to 2 but the team continues to make a most valuable contribution towards the wellbeing of prisoners and their families. The reduction in staff has meant that supervised family visits can no longer take place on Sundays, although an exception may be made if a family cannot visit on any other day – such flexibility is admirable. The lower number in the prison has provided an opportunity to spread the range of their work to be more pro-active among YOs and Remands. Occasionally FCDO officers can now use the Visits Room as well as the “Little Cherubs” room which is part of the St Margaret Centre. A recent Open Day for Children's Panel members was much appreciated by those attending.

***Summary:* the ability to offer high quality family visits continues to be special in Cornton Vale and particularly necessary in a women's prison.**

Mother and Baby Unit

Following the Chief Inspector's unfavourable report about the Unit, the Aberlour Trust has refurbished and redecorated the area to make it a much more pleasant environment. It now looks clean and bright and properly equipped for mothers' and babies' needs. The outside recreation area unavailable at the time of last year's report can now be used. At present the Unit is unoccupied and has been so for several months.

Physical Education

The PE department has continued to do good work with the YO's. "Girls on the Move" courses take place at regular intervals, some women qualifying as leaders and two going on to earn the Platinum award which qualifies them to take groups on their own.

The popular Zumba dancing has also been continued. The group work involving music and movement has proved very successful but staff are aware that it is always the same group of women who take part.

To address this it is hoped to find some form of exercise which will encourage those who have never wanted or felt able to take any physical exercise, to do so.

The Committee regrets that the idea of PE in the open air seems almost to have been abandoned. A netball hoop and a ball in each exercise area would be well-used and does not need the supervision of a sports trained officer.

Summary: the PE team is to be commended on their effort to broaden the range of PE available.

Visits

At busy times the Visits area remains very cramped with no chance of holding a conversation which cannot be overheard, but monitoring has found that with the lower numbers the average use of the room does not justify enlarging the space.

The Committee is concerned that the situation regarding the needs of visitors has not changed since last year's report. It is accepted that good family contact is one of the most important elements in reducing re-offending. It is a great pity that visits to Cornton Vale, often from a long distance using several means of transport, should be more stressful than they need be.

Reception

The workload has increased since Edinburgh began to take women prisoners because there are more movements. All women come to Cornton Vale when sentenced and then move to Edinburgh as places become available, possibly several weeks later. We are pleased to report that this extra pressure is about to be relieved by the appointment of a full-time Administrator who will work in the Reception area and will take over paperwork and the Transfer Desk. Additional staff will also help out at key times of day.

There were some teething problems when G4S took over from Reliance while the new operators were getting used to the needs of each prison. It would be most helpful if Reception staff could be in computer contact with the Courts to have forewarning of who is coming to Cornton Vale and when.

Section 7

THE WORK OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

Visiting Committee Statistics		
	2010/11	2011/12
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	7
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	nil	nil
Number of VC members leaving within the reporting period	nil	nil
Total number of VC committee meetings during reporting period	9	9
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	7	7
Total number of applications/complaints received		
(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.)		
Total number of visits to the prison*	160 visits	

Total number of visits to the establishment or meetings connected therewith 2011/12

Jim Scott	46	
Mirren Begbie	20	
Penny Johnston	24	
Julie McEachern	29	
Jan Nicholson	12	** due to illness
Christine Grant	18	
Anne Montgomery	11	
Total for group	160	

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.)

Applications/Complaints Statistics		
Subject	2010/11	2011/12
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
Christine Grant	March 2011								SPS			
JScott, JMcEachern, MBegbie, CGrant, A Montgomery, JNicholson												Conf 2011 6 of 7 members
Jim Scott	March 2011											
Penny Johnston, Julie McEachern	Sept 2011											
** 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)	Course Name (Tutor)	Course Name (Tutor)	Course Name (Tutor)	Course Name (Tutor)
Jim Scott, Julie McEachern, Jan Nicholson, Mirren Begbie, Penny Johnston, Christine Grant	Oct 2011	Anti-hostage and Breakaway training by Andy Smith Cornton Vale				
Jim Scott, Penny Johnston, Christine Grant, Julie McEachern	May 2012	Fire Training By Andy Smith Cornton Vale				