

Over 21s Visiting Committee

HM Prison and Young Offenders' Institution
Cornton Vale



Annual Report 2012 - 2013

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 two 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. The Committee has continued to function effectively and this is a great tribute to their commitment and determination.

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

The Visiting Committee has been fortunate in receiving the support of the three local authorities, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling in recruiting and supporting members. This support has been critical at a time of substantial change in our membership. We are grateful to Falkirk Council for the provision of clerking services 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

5th August, 2013

© Over 21s Visiting Committee, HM Prison and Young Offenders' Institution,
Cornton Vale, 2013

Published by the Over 21s Visiting Committee,
HM Prison and Young Offenders' Institution, Cornton Vale
and Printed by Falkirk Council

Contents

Section 1	Statutory Role of the Visiting Committee	1
Section 2	Executive Summary	2
Section 3	Description of the Prison	4
Section 4	Principal Areas Within the Prison	5
	4.1 Healthcare and Mental Health	5
	4.2 Food	5
	4.3 Equality and Diversity	6
	4.4 Education, Training, Work, the Gym and Remand Prisoners	6
	4.5 Residential Accommodation	8
	4.6 Prison Estate & Administration	9
	4.7 Links Centre	10
Section 5	Other Areas Within the Prison	11
	5.1 Family Contact Team	11
	5.2 Social Work	11
	5.3 Programmes	11
	5.4 Chaplaincy	12
Section 6	The Work of the Visiting Committee	13

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 and 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

We welcome the political and operational commitment which has been made to tackle the overall issue of the future of the women's estate. The decision taken to develop a National Women's Prison and to support this with a number of regional centres and a commitment to refurbishing accommodation within Cornton Vale in the interim period gives hope for a better future. The housing of over 150 women in Greenock and Edinburgh has substantially reduced overcrowding in Cornton Vale and the benefits of initial refurbishment works are already in evidence.

The use of Polmont accommodation to enable major refurbishment work to commence has proved extremely successful and has been exceptionally well managed.

The introduction of radical changes to the management structure and a considerable influx of new staff has made a positive contribution to the way women are managed and supported. Overcrowding resulted in a very complicated and shifting mix of prisoners. Plans to utilise the refurbished accommodation to support a more rational distribution of women and young offenders promises to provide a much more effective and stable accommodation regime.

The prison has experienced another year of very substantial change and the pace of change does not yet appear to be diminishing. While the benefits of change are clear to see, and have been well managed, continued change combined with a degree of uncertainty for the future is clearly stressful for staff, women and young offenders. We would hope that, in the next two years, there will be a more stable position, particularly with respect to membership of the senior and middle management teams. Despite major changes and substantial areas where accommodation is still poor, we have been impressed by the commitment of staff and the forbearance of women.

The Health Centre continues to deal with an increasing number of very vulnerable women, many of whom have serious mental health issues and some of whom would be much better accommodated in a secure hospital environment. While accommodating women in Greenock and Edinburgh has reduced the overall number of women being accommodated in Cornton Vale, it does not appear to have had a major impact on

the demands for health support.

Given ageing accommodation, a small budget, dispersed dining accommodation and the impact of the movement of women to Edinburgh, Greenock and now Polmont, the Cookhouse does a remarkable job. Its success is reflected in the considerable reduction in issues raised this year (down 79% from last year).

Considerable efforts have been made to improve the effectiveness of the Equality and Diversity team and more improvements are planned.

Women are able to access a wide range of educational, training and work opportunities and considerable efforts are made to enable women to participate in all three areas. The intention to widen community involvement is particularly welcome. The very substantial operational input made by work parties to the day to day running of the prison is often overlooked.

The rolling refurbishment programmes are making an observable difference to the residential environment within the prison. The accommodation to enable these programmes to proceed has been well managed. The new Dumyat unit, after initial design difficulties, is providing a better environment than the accommodation it replaced.

The Independent Living Units continue to provide an essential "halfway house" environment for women re-entering society.

There are welcome plans to use the refurbished accommodation to enable a more rational accommodation strategy, replacing the somewhat haphazard use which had developed as a result of overcrowding.

We very much welcome the decision to change management structures to create more effective and efficient management roles. The appointment of residential managers with clear, localised responsibilities has introduced the possibility of improvements in the way the blocks are managed. However, many of the changes have created "knock-on" moves where a series of posts are vacated as a result of an initial move.

While we appreciate that the quality of the environment is a crucial factor, how women are managed and

supported is even more so. In the next two years Cornton Vale will face on-going change but has the opportunity to set the tone for the way the new National Women's Prison and local area prisons will operate. There is a need for a degree of staff stability, particularly at senior management level, in this coming critical time of change.

The Links Centre continues to provide a safe welcoming and effective doorway to a considerable number of internal and external opportunities for women. The Family Contact team is a model of good practice in supporting the needs of prisoners and their families. The plans for a new hub facility are extremely encouraging. Social Work staff continue to provide an invaluable service, working with staff in Edinburgh and Greenock and supporting women being moved to Polmont. Programmes are fully staffed and waiting times for programmes have been reduced.

In conclusion, this has been a year of remarkable change, with considerable improvements to the fabric and the way women are managed and supported. The pace and volume of change has been well managed, although we do receive informal comments from staff about their uncertainty about their own future. The various refurbishment and development programmes are producing observable improvements in the physical environment and the management and support of women. It is clear that developments planned for 2013-14 will move these areas further forward.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the political and operational commitment to renewing the women's estate;
- the decision to improve accommodation and facilities within Cornton Vale in the interim;
- the quality of planning for refurbishments;
- the commitment to providing Cornton Vale health staff to Polmont to meet the needs of women being accommodated there;
- the contribution which work parties make to the overall operation of the prison;
- the quality and range of food offered on a small budget;
- the continuing developments taking place in Equality and Diversity, in particular the publication of the new guide and the wide range of activities

actively being offered to promote equality and diversity;

- the range of educational opportunities available to women in Cornton Vale;
- the decision to reallocate accommodation in a more systematic way;
- the decision to look at improving the regime in the "top end" and the ILUs;
- the opening of the new segregation unit;
- the many positive initiatives designed to improve management effectiveness and efficiency;
- the willingness to look at regime change;
- the planned improvements to existing facilities and the introduction of new facilities;
- the commitment to improving the experiences of women being introduced to Cornton Vale;
- the commitment of prison and visiting organisation's staff to supporting women;
- the commitment of staff to supporting women and their families;
- increased staffing stability and availability of programmes; and
- the Scottish Prison Service's prompt response to the concerns of the Public Service Ombudsman's determination regarding a Strategy for supporting prisoners whose personal accounts are at variance with the trial judge's report.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the number of women with severe mental health issues who are sent to Cornton Vale;
- the continuing poor quality of accommodation in the Health Centre and Reception;
- the issues surrounding the two-tier NHS complaints system;
- the impact on the stability of work parties by the constant removal of women at short notice to Edinburgh and Greenock;
- the impact of staff absence on work parties and the locking up of women who are then not able to attend;
- the lower level of use of gym facilities by women, when compared with the male estate;

- the general lack of educational, training and work opportunities for women held on remand;
- the communal toilet arrangements being continued in most blocks following refurbishment (although we do recognise the short time nature of the issue and the financial cost if this were to be changed);
- the constant changes in roles at senior and middle management level;
- the need to improve the quality of the Reception centre;
- the location of Social Work services in a “back room” location;
- the need for improved internal and external communication;
- the lack of external validation for SPS programmes, in particular, the Female Offending Behaviour Programme; and
- the amount of time the main chaplaincy accommodation is unused.



3. Description of the Prison

HM Prison and Young Offenders Institution, Cornton Vale, is situated in Central Scotland, a few miles from the City of Stirling and is operated by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS).

Built in 1975, it was designed as a campus prison to hold 180 convicted women and young offenders in four residential blocks. In 1978 Parliament passed legislation to allow women to be held there on remand. In 1999, adults and young offenders were housed separately.

There are five residential blocks, four being part of the original prison (Bruce, Peebles, Younger and Skye) and one being built later (Wallace). There is one block (Ross House) designated to cater for the needs of women with severe mental health issues and especially vulnerable women. Ross House is also used to accommodate women during their first night in custody. Dumyat House, a new separation unit, has been built onto Ross House. Only Wallace, Ross and Dumyat have in-cell sanitation, the others having shared toilet and shower areas. Most of the remaining

areas of the prison are part of the original construction.

A long period, during which the prison population rose substantially and very little financial investment was made in the estate, resulted in an extremely poor and crowded environment, where over 400 women were regularly housed. This state of affairs was highlighted by successive Inspectorate reports and in a series of Annual Reports from this Visiting Committee. The issue of overcrowding was partially resolved by housing a proportion of women in Greenock Prison and, later in Saughton Prison in Edinburgh. In addition, a rolling programme of minor refurbishment was started in Cornton Vale.

Finally, a political and operational commitment has been made to tackle the future of the women’s estate. A decision was taken to develop a National Women’s Prison and to support this with a number of regional centres. In the interim, a commitment was made to refurbishing accommodation within Cornton Vale.



4. Principal Areas within the Prison

4.1 Healthcare and Mental Health:

While a considerable number of women have been relocated to Edinburgh and Greenock, this change has not been paralleled by a similar reduction in the demand for health care services. Staff members are still dealing with high levels of need. We recognise their commitment to continuing to meet this need.

The physical condition of the Health Centre continues to be a concern. While appreciating the priority being given to residential accommodation, there is a need to improve the quality of health areas (the Health Centre and the health area in Reception).

We continue to be concerned by the number of women with serious mental health issues who are being sent to Cornton Vale. While we recognise the considerable efforts which are put in to manage and support them, staff, particularly those in Ross House, are dealing with many women whose needs are beyond the provision which a prison establishment can offer.

We still receive many issues raised regarding the time taken to process prescriptions from GPs and confusion amongst women as to why this is happening. We do appreciate that this is a result of issues beyond the prison but would welcome some thought being given to improving the situation.

The introduction of a two-tier complaints system, following the transfer of responsibility of health from the SPS to NHS Forth Valley, has introduced a degree of confusion amongst women and residential staff. We are now confident that both forms are widely available, but less sure that women are confident about which form to use. We have also received concerns from women about the way these forms are processed.

We welcome the decision to take health staff from Cornton Vale to provide services in Polmont during the temporary movement of women.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the continuing commitment of health staff to providing and maintaining a high level of service in poor accommodation; and
- the commitment to providing Cornton Vale health staff to Polmont.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the number of women with severe mental health issues who are sent to Cornton Vale;
- the continuing poor quality of accommodation in the Health Centre and Reception; and
- issues surrounding the two-tier complaints system.

4.2 Food:

All food is prepared in the cookhouse in the Central Block, supervised by a manager and 4 chefs. There are between 15-16 women working in the cookhouse work party. A wide range of different needs are catered for. There are menus for vegans and those with allergies. Pregnant women receive additional milk for extra calories. The budget for each prisoner is £2.90 per day. Halal meals are also available. There is additionally great enthusiasm within the prison for specialised curry and themed nights. Vegetables are grown in the prison gardens and used when in season.

The food is transported to the relevant blocks and is kept at 90 degrees. It is served within a pantry/dining area and is hot.

The cookhouse is always very clean and tidy and there is no apparent spillage. The staff are friendly and very fair with the prisoners. They also educate the prisoners on how to prepare food, which adds to their skills and experience. One prisoner indicated that this assistance both enhanced her cooking skills and set her up for future opportunities in a working environment.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the contribution which this area makes to the overall operation of the prison;
- the commitment of staff to supporting the women; and
- the quality and range of food offered on such a small budget.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the impact on the stability of the work party by the constant removal of women at short notice to Edinburgh and Greenock.

4.3 Equality and Diversity:

As part of the SPS Equality and Diversity Strategic Action Plan which Cornton Vale must comply with, there is a requirement for two activities or events over the year to promote good relationships. Three meetings must also be held.

In terms of activities/events, a Paralympics event took part in June and was very successful and well attended. Other activities/events have included 'Thailand Day' and 'International Women's Day'. Promotional items (pens/notepads etc.) have been handed out at these events to encourage attendance.

Meetings have also been held regularly and as a result of these the profile of equality and diversity has been raised with the publication of a new easy to read guide for female offenders to help them understand and access equality and diversity services within the estate. The guide explains what is covered by the law under the Equality Act and the names of those within the prison who are responsible for providing support. Posters promoting equality and diversity services have also been posted around the estate along with copies of the new guide. It is expected that this model will be adopted at other SPS establishments in the future.

Identifying prisoners quickly on admission with particular equality and diversity needs was recognised as being problematic. It was agreed that a form would be produced for Reception staff to complete and forward to a member of the Equality and Diversity Team to address this.

There are now 13 staff on the Team and their names are listed on the guide. They have all attended various training on equality and diversity laws and issues and there are lead officers in place for each protected characteristic. There is no formal SPS training in place although there have been a lot of resources spent on training at Cornton Vale over the past year and an e-learning package is completed by all staff.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the continuing developments in equality and diversity, in particular the publication of the new guide and the wide range of activities actively being offered to promote equality and diversity.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the lack of 'formal' training for all staff and the delay

in implementing a robust system to ensure that prisoners with particular equality and diversity needs/issues are recognised quickly on admission.

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

a) Education:

The prison is about halfway through a four year contract with Motherwell College and lecturers come in regularly to facilitate the programmes.

Education staff members work hard to liaise with all prison staff, especially those in charge of work parties, to ensure the women have as great an opportunity as possible to participate in education. There is a high degree of flexibility allowing women who have jobs during one part of the day to attend courses when they are free, and work party members and leaders are encouraged to participate in special events.

The emphasis is on the core skills of Literacy and Numeracy but there are also courses on offer related to life skills, evidenced through a comprehensive timetable. There is wide a range of ability amongst the women who attend. They are diagnostically assessed at induction and personal learning plans are put in place for the women to take advantage of what best suits them.

Women in full time education attend a minimum of 12 classes with around 10 – 20 achieving qualifications every month. Women who participate in work parties attend a maximum of 4 classes a week. All women are paid 30p for each class they attend.

Education staff have been asked by Headquarters to design a course on Universal Credits, raising awareness of the changes in the benefit system. This is a 2 day course with another 2 half days linked on the subject of money matters. This is a compulsory component for women in education, particularly those on the pre-release list and has been receiving good feedback from participants. However there remains a difficulty in getting enough women to attend on each consecutive day. Although SPS Headquarters have asked for this to be produced, there perhaps needs to be a greater awareness amongst prison staff regarding its importance.

The Library has been closed for refurbishment and restocking. It is run by one pass woman, with a second

just appointed and has perhaps been underused in the past. Library rules have been revamped in an effort to encourage responsibility and the ability to record library activities and numbers involved. Unfortunately, if a pass woman is off-shift, the library is closed. The literacy programme, Toe-by-Toe, is in place with four officers trained and four women offering to become mentors. A new library timetable has been drawn up indicating slots for educational input, work party involvement and time for residents from each house. It is hoped that a refurbished appearance will motivate more women to become involved, together with incentive schemes around producing book reviews, and that the library will become a more central focus.

The cookery class continues to be a great success, making a major contribution to the educational and social skills and the welfare of participants.

b) Training and Work:

Activities and opportunities offered include a Bike Workshop, Catering, Craft Enterprise, Education and Library, Garden, Waste Management and Recycling, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, Industrial Cleaning, Laundry, Links Centre, Pantry and Housekeeping, Gym and Reception.

We have been impressed by the quality of opportunities which work parties offer and the changes which have been made in the past year. The essential work undertaken by the laundry, catering, cleaning, pantry and housekeeping work parties is often not appreciated, but the prison could not operate without their constant, quality input. The other work parties also make very valuable contributions to the quality of the environment, the skills development and the comfort of women. The Garden work party has made a considerable contribution to the improvement of the physical environment with grass cutting, new flower beds, tubs and baskets, waste management and litter clearing. The reintroduction and extension of polytunnels is most welcome, providing fresh herbs and vegetables for the cookhouse. The bicycle repair workshop provides quality training in an area offering employment opportunities. The hairdressing and beauty therapy work party not only teaches marketable skills, but also provides a well-used and popular service to women. The card workshop and related shop provide craft and retail skills development and an invaluable service to women.

In addition, a variable number of women attend Addictions Programmes, the Links Centre and the Gym each day.

The range of activities is welcome but there have been occasions when individual work parties have been closed down due to short and long term staff absences.

Considerable efforts have been put in to cope with the movement of women from Cornton Vale to Edinburgh and Greenock prisons. For a considerable number of women this often happens after only a short stay in Cornton Vale and impacts heavily on the membership of work parties.

Now that a considerable proportion of women are housed in Greenock and Edinburgh we would welcome the opportunity to compare the availability of education, training and work in these establishments.

c) Gym Facility:

The gym has been refurbished during the past year, including painting, the addition of a wall of mirrors, new flooring and the removal of the stage. This has increased the floor area and has allowed for additional fitness equipment, some supplied from surplus stock in Shotts Prison.

A range of fitness programmes is delivered by the three trained Physical Education staff dedicated to the gym, including exercise to music, 'zumba' and 'metafit'. The latter is a short, intensive fitness programme most women prisoners find very hard.

The gym facility is available for untried and young offenders, as well as individual sessions for mothers with babies – the baby being looked after by an officer in the gym while the mother exercises. The facility is also available to staff.

Of concern to the VC is the observation that despite many available sessions, and three daily staff shifts, commencing at 7 a.m., the gym continues to be under-used, in contrast to the gym facilities in male prisons. There appear to be two main reasons for this: the established lifestyle patterns of many women prisoners are not conducive to making the effort to exercise in a structured way, and consistent encouragement by residential staff, in view of the many other demands on their time, is not always given. The low self-esteem of many of the women is thought to be a contributing factor in non-attendance.

In conclusion, the newly refurbished gym is a valuable asset within the prison, and the enthusiasm and dedication of the P.E. staff has been particularly noted by the Visiting Committee.

d) Remand Prisoners:

We continue to be concerned that women in remand have very few opportunities. We continually get comments from women about this issue. We do appreciate that there are suggestions for improving this situation but would welcome it getting priority.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the range of educational opportunities available to women in Cornton Vale;
- the efforts put in by staff to ensure appropriate work, training and supervision; and
- support given to work parties in terms of upgrading equipment.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the effect of movements to Edinburgh and Greenock on work party stability;
- the impact of staff absence on work parties and the locking up of women who are then not able to attend;
- the lower level of use of gym facilities by women, when compared with the male estate; and
- the general lack of education, training and work opportunities for women held on remand.

4.5 Residential Accommodation:

We very much welcome the decision to plan for a new National Women's Prison and to develop new regional centres for women in different parts of the country. We also very much welcome the decision to commit funding in order to substantially refurbish and extend much of the accommodation within Cornton Vale to provide a radically improved environment for the period until new centres are operational.

The availability of accommodation in Polmont Young Offenders Institution is providing the opportunity to empty blocks for refurbishment, making the task much easier for the contractors and very much less stressful for women and staff. We also welcome the decision to send Cornton Vale staff to Polmont to manage and supervise the women moved there.

During the past few years the stress of coping with increasingly large numbers of women has led to much internal movement of women, the mixing of different categories of offender in the same block (although not in the same unit) and the loss of a clear "progression route", especially for longer term prisoners. We very much welcome proposals to re-establish a refurbished, lockable unit for young offenders, a separate unit for remand prisoners, a commitment to having a clearer progression route and an improved regime for a "Top end" Unit.

The reduced numbers in Cornton Vale have resulted in reduced stress, in particular the substantial reduction in multiple cell occupancy. We recognise that there are situations when it is in the best interest of women not to be in a single cell, however, we do still see women doubled up as a result of accommodation shortages.

Independent Living Units (ILUs) - There are six semi-detached houses with a capacity for 24 residents, providing a valuable asset to the prison. The availability of these units provides many women with an opportunity for independent living and employment, an essential to preparing for release.

During the year there has been recognition of the need for some regime changes and we look forward to these being implemented.

Dumyat House - Separation Unit - This new unit, providing accommodation for women who are either on a Rule prohibiting association, or are detained for safety reasons, was initially opened on 25th June 2012. Owing to serious damage caused by a prisoner, involving a serious threat to staff, the unit was closed on 27th June while remedial work was carried out. It opened three months later after modifications to provide two "safe cells" (i.e. ligature free) were completed.

The unit has a capacity of six, in single cells provided with a shower and toilet. There are strengthened steel partitions in the two "safe cells". A radio speaker is set into the wall but television is not normally available owing to damage caused to TV sets by occupants. Meals are taken in the cell, and there is a small, heavily secured exercise yard. The unit is staffed from 8 a.m. till 5.30 p.m. by three officers and from 5.30 p.m. until 9.45 p.m. by one officer. Officers' accommodation within the unit is adequate and includes a shower for their use. Staff in the adjoining Ross House cover night duty.

The average length of stay in the unit is five days - the maximum under the detention rule, but exceptionally, this can be extended to several weeks if considered necessary.

Women sometimes request to be admitted to Dumyat for their own safety and security.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the political and operational commitment to renewing the women's estate;
- the decision to improve accommodation and facilities within Cornton Vale in the interim;
- the quality of planning for refurbishments;
- the decision to reallocate accommodation in a more systematic way;
- the decision to look at improving the regime in the "Top end" and the ILUs; and
- the opening of the new segregation unit.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- communal toilet arrangements being continued in most blocks (although we do recognise the short time nature of the issue and the financial cost if this was to be changed);
- the need for a "first night in custody" unit outwith Ross; and
- the need for a separate "safe" unit outwith Dumyat and Ross.

4.6 Prison Estate & Administration:

a) Estate and Housekeeping:

There has been a noticeable improvement in the provision of clothing and bedding and the general appearance of residential blocks in advance of major refurbishment. There have been occasions when in-block cleaning has been of concern.

b) Administration:

Staffing: We have again been surprised by the level of staff changes during the past year. We welcome the substantial introduction of staff from other parts of the prison estate, who clearly bring with them different experiences.

Appointment of Residential Managers: The appointment of residential managers with clear localised responsibilities has introduced the possibility

of improvements in the way the blocks are managed. It certainly has made it much easier for Visiting Committee members to take forward issues raised by women.

Management Planning: We very much welcome the decision to change management structures to create more effective and efficient management roles. However, many of the changes have created "knock-on" moves where a series of posts are vacated as a result of an initial move.

While we appreciate that the quality of the environment is a crucial factor, how women are managed and supported is even more so. In the next two years Cornton Vale will face on-going change but has the opportunity to set the tone for the way the new National Women's Prison will operate. We would welcome a degree of staff stability, particularly at senior management level, in this time of change.

Visits: The visits area has been improved and we understand that there are plans to introduce a new Hub and an upgrade of the visiting and "front of house" facilities.

Reception: This area of the prison continues to provide a safe, efficient and effective entry area for women and to manage their movement on a daily basis. Because it is such a critical part of the women's experience, particularly on first entry to the prison, we would welcome some improvement to the fabric of the area.

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: While we appreciate the rationale behind this move and support the principle of having separate accommodation for the first night in custody, we still regularly meet women who state that being in Ross for their first night has not been a good experience for them.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the many positive initiatives designed to improve management effectiveness and efficiency;
- the willingness to look at regime change;
- the planned improvements to existing facilities and the introduction of new facilities; and

- a commitment to improving the experiences of women being introduced to Cornton Vale.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the constant changes in personnel at senior and middle management level; and
- the need to improve the quality of the Reception centre.

4.7 Links Centre:

The Links Centre provides a welcoming, therapeutic environment. Induction takes place here and women also have their appointments with the various agencies located here. These include Housing, Benefits, Open Secret, Caledonia Youth, SACRO and many others. The Centre can be busy depending on the number of admissions. If anyone is disruptive, officers try to deal with the situation very quickly and think 'outside the box' in dealing with the needs of the women. If anyone is distressed, one of the officers who was formerly a Family Contact Development Officer (FCDO) uses her expertise and experience to deal effectively and empathetically with the woman involved and to engage her to solve any problem. The officers here enjoy working with the women. With returning prisoners they can build a relationship and address any issue (e.g. housing or benefits). The Education Centre is very

flexible in dealing with women with literacy challenges.

One issue which has been raised is the completion of forms for Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants which covers items like clothes, a bed, furnishings etc. Women get these approximately six weeks prior to their liberation date. Officers have to give these out and are not comfortable with the responsibility as the forms are quite complicated and if incorrectly completed could affect grants given. This has been raised with prison management for discussion.

During the year the Links Centre set up sessions on Monday afternoons when agencies are collected together. This is for women who are going through pre-release (about six weeks before being liberated) and gives an immediate response to issues raised by the women. These sessions include Phoenix, Addiction Support, SACRO and Job Centre plus.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the commitment of prison and visiting organisation's staff to supporting women;
- the range of support available; and
- the commitment to extending the range of opportunities.



5. Other Areas within the Prison

5.1 Family Contact Team:

This team continues to provide an excellent service to women and families. Little Cherub visits are one of the most cherished opportunities for women with young families and make a major contribution to family welfare. The team provides a model of good practice.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the commitment of staff to supporting women and their families.

5.2 Social Work:

During the year Social Work has been fully staffed. There are four full time social workers which include two job share posts. There is one administrative worker and the Team Leader. The main change for the year is the transfer of women to Polmont and Social Work continues to provide a service to the women on designated days. Integrated Case Management (ICM) continues to be held there for long term prisoners. The general view is that the accommodation is better than Cornton Vale but has more limited opportunities for women. Some work parties get half a day's work instead of a full day, although their wages have been maintained.

In terms of the location of Social Work within Cornton Vale, it is at the back of the Links Centre behind secure doors. The staff feel they do not have optimum accommodation and are "locked away". As a result, they are not accessible and have to make the effort to go out into the prison to meet and talk to staff and women. There is still a feeling of uncertainty about the future of Cornton Vale and therefore uncertainty amongst staff about their future and terms and conditions. The feeling of isolation has eased a little with the recent link to 'The Source', the Stirling Council website.

There was a feeling that communication could be improved. For example when women on their caseloads are moved to Greenock it can take some time to be reported to them and there is a gap before they are informed of downgrading incidents in blocks and intelligence information about women.

Social workers have to do a lot of fact finding. The Laundry was highlighted as a good work party for keeping them informed and up-to-date with what is

happening and some individual managers.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the services provided to women.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the location of such a key service in a "back room" location;
- the need for improved internal and external communication; and
- the need for more involvement of staff in planning for their future.

5.3 Programmes:

Staffing stability and the increased availability of programmes is most welcome.

There have been some indications that women transferred to Edinburgh and Greenock have not returned to avail themselves of programmes.

Concern had been expressed regarding the lack of a clear strategy for dealing with women whose personal account did not match the trial judge's report. Following a successful complaint to the Public Service Ombudsman, the Scottish Prison Service responded quickly and effectively, publishing a clear guidance note for prison staff across the entire estate. Visiting Committee members have also been concerned that the Female Offending Behaviour (FOB) programme, a central plank of the Cornton Vale rehabilitation strategy, has never been validated. Informal concerns have been expressed regarding the issue of confidentiality relating to the workshop in FOB where women are required to acknowledge the detail of their experience relating to the trial judge's report. We look forward to being able to explore these two issues more closely in the coming year.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the increased staffing stability and availability of programmes; and
- the Scottish Prison Service's prompt response to the concerns of the Public Service Ombudsman's determination regarding a Strategy for supporting prisoners whose personal accounts are at variance with the trial judge's report.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- a lack of external validation for SPS programmes, in particular, the Female Offending Behaviour Programme.

5.4 Chaplaincy:

Three Chaplains offer a comprehensive religious and pastoral support programme. Women regularly speak about the value of both these aspects. In addition, there are regular events organised which offer activities to women and the possibility of wider community involvement.

The Visiting Committee commends:

- the quality and range of services provided; and
- the empathetic approach of the Chaplains.

The Visiting Committee is concerned by:

- the amount of time the main accommodation is unused.



6. The Work of the Visiting Committee, 2012-2013

6.1 Visiting Committee Statistics	2012-13	2011-12
Recommended complement of VC members	15	15
Number of VC members at start of the reporting period	9	10
Number of VC members at end of the reporting period	10	9
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	2	4
Number of VC members leaving within the reporting period	2	5
Total number of VC Committee meetings during reporting period	6	6
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	6	7
Total number of applications received	105	154
Total number of visits to the prison	338	253

6.2 Members:

Jim Blackwood (From April 2012), Murray Dickie, Moira Graham, Janelle Hall, Alison Lambie, Joy Macfarlane, Rosemary McKinley, Sharon Mylchreest, Joan Paterson (From April 2012 until March 2013), Pat Reid (Until April 2012) and Marilyn Stenhouse.

6.3 Activities:

Core Activity: The Cornton Vale Over 21s Visiting Committee members undertook Statutory Visits to every part of the prison during the course of the year. Members responded to 118 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, 2012-2013 and 2011-2012				
Response Time	2012-2013		2011-2012	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0 to 5 days	53	72	86	73
6 to 10 days	14	19	28	24
10+ days	7	9	4	3
Totals	74	100	118	100

Members also responded to requests from 32 women who met them en route, giving a total of 105 requests. 186 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 219 women). All statutory visits; other visits and follow ups to women and induction sessions are followed by written reports submitted to the Governor.

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.

Continuing changes and uncertainty around the future of VCs led to more changes in membership. This involved existing members supporting new members by means of a considerable number of interviews, prison visits and mentored visiting. This will continue into the 2013-2014 year.

Additional Member Activity: In addition to their core activity, members attended a night visit, supported events (education and chaplaincy) and attended residential block and service meetings within the prison; supported prison visits and attended AVC meetings, the AVC Annual General Meeting and meetings of the Howard League.

6.3 b Breakdown of Activities Undertaken By Members in 2012-13

Activity	Member Contacts	Hours	Percentage of Hours
Direct Contact With Prisoners and Statutory Visits (1)	286	303.58	53.51
Visiting Committee Meetings	48	129.96	22.91
Data Collection for Reports	4	2.06	0.36
Visiting Committee Formal and Informal Training	18	60.50	10.66
Association of Visiting Committee Conference	2	18.58	3.27
Association of Visiting Committee Meetings	3	9.25	1.63
Criminal Justice Authority Meetings	1	2.50	0.44
Visits about and to Polmont Prison	6	13.42	0.00
Consultations	4	22.50	2.37
Justice Department Officials	2	5.00	3.97
Total (2) and (3)	374	567.35	0.88

(1) As part of the mentoring process some visits were attended by two members.

(2) 338 member visits were made to the prison.

(3) This does not include travel time and time spent writing reports.

6.3 c Contact with Women

Nature of Contact	2012 - 2013		2011 - 2012	
	Number	%	Number	%
Requests for Assistance (Gate Book)	74	14	118	30
Requests for Assistance (On Route)	35	7	32	8
Follow-up Visits	186	35	193	50
Induction	219	42	42	11
Residential Meetings	2	2	1	1
Total	516	100	386	100

The Members' Log records a detailed breakdown of the number of direct contacts with individual women. As the number of women has decreased, requests have declined by about a third. Follow-up visits have shown much less of a decline, with a number of longer running, complicated issues being dealt with. Additional effort has gone into supporting the induction programme for recently convicted women, with 51 out of 52 possible induction sessions being delivered.

6.4 Analysis of All Issues Raised by Women

Topic	2012-2013		2011-2012		Change *
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Accommodation	59	19.60	185	43.43	-68
Discipline/Security	21	6.98	10	2.35	+110
Diversity Related	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Education/training/work	19	6.31	12	2.82	+58
Estates and housekeeping	34	11.30	50	11.74	-32
Family/visits	16	5.32	37	8.69	-57
Food	4	1.33	19	4.46	-79
HDC	4	1.33	3	0.70	+33
Health Related	55	18.27	36	8.45	+53
Inter-estate/cross border	14	4.65	17	3.99	-18
Open Estate/ILU	15	4.98	11	2.58	+36
Personal/property	17	5.65	18	4.23	-6
Prisoner related issues	7	2.33	9	2.11	-22
Progression	22	7.31	10	2.35	+120
Staff Related issues	8	2.66	5	1.17	+60
Miscellaneous	6	1.99	4	0.94	+50
Total Issues raised	301	100	426	100	

* This is the percentage change between the number of issues raised in 2011-12 and 2012-13

The reduction of the prison population following the provision of additional accommodation in Edinburgh has had an impact on our activity. The total number of issues raised has fallen from 426 to 301, some 30%. However, there is still a considerable volume of issues being raised by women.

The most marked decrease has been in terms of issues relating to Accommodation, reducing from 185 to 59, a drop of nearly 70% and Food, with a drop of nearly 80%. There have also been significant drops in issues raised about Family Visits and Estates and Housekeeping.

However, a number of areas have seen considerable increases, notably Progression and Discipline/Security where figures have more than doubled and Health and the Open Estate/ILUs which have increased by 53% and 36% respectively.

The increase in Education/Training/Work was influenced by a number of issues being raised by women in remand. We have not listed changes as significant when the number of issues raised in either period was less than ten.

6.5 Detailed Breakdown of the Issues Raised by Women During 2012-2013

Topic	Number	Detail
Accommodation	59	Cell furniture (1), Cold end cell (2), Doubled up (3), House meetings not happening (3), Housed with Schedule 1 offenders (4), Lack of cleaning and bins (18), Lock ups (3) Mobility (2), No TV (1), Privacy issues over shower curtains (1), Supplies (1), Toilet access (14) and Top end Facilities (6).
Discipline/Security	21	72 hour rule (1), Banned visitor (2), Closed visits (3), Complaint Forms (2), Lock ups (1), Lost money from office (4), Missing clothes (1), Missing mail (3), PC1 form (1), Removed from Room (1), Security category (1) and Time out decision (1).
Diversity Related	0	
Education/training/work	19	Access to Education (1), Access to toilets while on exercise (1), Dismissed from Work (3), New Wage Structure (1), Remand not enough to do (9), Wages (1), Work party allocation (2) and Work patterns (1).
Estates and housekeeping	34	Ant infestations (5), Bruce Shower Unit not fixed (1), Clothing and bedding (22), Health and safety in Bruce (2), Heating (1), No fridge for milk for pregnant women (1) and Repairs needed in Bruce (1).
Family/visits	16	Chapel Visit (1), Cherub Visits (3), Disabled visit (1), Family and friends Visits (9), Inter-prison visit (1) and Request for double visit (1).
Food	4	Breakfast (2), Menus (1) and Quality of Food (1).
HDC	4	Availability (4).
Health Related	55	Access to health support (15), ACT restrictions (1), Complaint against staff (1), Complaint CP3 (1), Dentist (2), Drug support (6), Hospital admission (1), Medication (20), Mental Health (7) and Psychiatric support (1).
Inter-estate/cross border	14	Edinburgh transfer (9), Greenock transfer (2), Inter-prison request (1) and Inter-prison visit (2).
Open Estate/ILU	15	ILU Licences (6), Gym access (8) and Home leave (1).
Personal/property	17	Hair straighteners (1), Obtaining money (3), Personal Clothing (1), Phone calls (6), Razors (1), Shop sheet selections and costs (2), Tampons (1) and Finance available (1).
Prisoner related issues	7	Bullying (2), Inter-block visits (1), Interpersonal Relationships (3) and Not being allowed to associate with partner (1).
Progression	22	Downgrading (8), Progression (14) and Referral to Programmes (1).
Staff Related issues	8	Breakdown in relationship between prisoner and staff - feeling intimidated (1), Staff not locking doors in Peebles (1), Staff walking unannounced into cells (2), Complaint against officer (1), Not allowed own T-shirt (1) and Not allowed drinks or books on outside exercise (2).
Miscellaneous	6	HMI Report (1), Lack of resources for Dundee area (1), New Prison Rules (1), Proceeds of crime (1), Request to light candles (1) and SEL (1).
Total Issues raised	301	

