

The Visiting Committee

HMYOI Polmont

Annual Report 2011

## **Introduction**

### **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;

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## SECTION 2

### HMYOI POLMONT

Polmont Young Offenders Institution is situated in central Scotland, close to the town of Falkirk. It is the largest centre in Scotland holding sentenced young offenders and remanded young men under 21 years of age. In the year under review prisoner numbers have, fluctuated from the high 600's to the high 700's. This report covers the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

Polmont is an impressively modern prison, with a high standard of accommodation, prisoner services and facilities. The under 18's facility, Blair House, is now a well established part of the Polmont estate providing high quality tailored interventions to this difficult and important age group.

Polmont provides many of the prisoner services in partnership with other agencies, public and voluntary. The list below notes some of these. In addition, hall staff deliver many interventions supported by Health Centre staff, Learning Centre staff and other officers.

Motherwell College – Learning Centre provision

Jobcentre Plus

Housing departments and agencies

Criminal Justice Social Work and Social Work Services

Religious/faith groups

Phoenix – addictions issues

Prisoner passport—Support/supervision, training, job skills and organising college courses

Sacro—support/supervision in the community

ROOP—Support/supervision and mentoring plus training and job opportunities

Civil Legal Assistance –Offers civil legal assistance/follow up support on release

Moving on Project—Through care assistance and training on release

Young Enterprise Scotland—Induction awareness and 4 week employability course

Rock Trust (Edinburgh)- housing and support

Caledonia Youth -sexual health and relationships education

Skills Development Scotland (Careers)

Strathclyde Law Clinic – Strathclyde University

Scottish Ensemble- music making

Alcoholics Anonymous

Glasgow addictions service

Barnardo's Youth Work

Radio Station – in partnership – SPS, Motherwell College, YES.

YCSA - Youth Community Support Agency – self confidence, social skills, employability

#### **Under 18's Provision**

Barnardo's Plan B Project

Caledonia Youth -sexual health and relationships education

Skills Development Scotland (Careers)

Stress Management / Self Esteem

Strathclyde Law Clinic – Strathclyde University

Visible Fictions – drama group

### **SECTION 3**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Committee is confident that HMYOI Polmont is a well managed and operated establishment that provides a high level of custody, care, support and intervention to young offenders and those remanded there in custody. We continue however to have concern at the underlying trend of high numbers of young offenders committed to custody in Scotland and to the continuing use of short-term sentences.

The committee is concerned at the levels of violence perpetrated by young offenders whilst they are held in Polmont. We recognise that management and staff are fully aware of the need to effectively address this and we commend their efforts to challenge and reduce the acceptability of the use of violence by prisoners.

The Committee is pleased to report the continued successful operation of the under 18s Hall – Blair House, and the strengthening of the preventing offending agenda through the introduction of the Plan B initiative, using a multiagency partnership approach.

Many encouraging initiatives have been undertaken throughout the year involving the arts, drama and music. Notable amongst these have been collaboration with the Scottish Ensemble, the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland and with artists from the National Galleries of Scotland. Within Polmont, the Radio Station has been a welcome and successful initiative. The sense of achievement and self –esteem that these can engender in those participating is extremely valuable.

Whilst the Committee commends the efforts to provide meaningful skills development and work opportunities for prisoners, the amount of time that prisoners still spend not engaged in any purposeful activity remains a major concern. In particular, we remain concerned about the amount of time spent watching television with some prisoners turning night into day and then being unfit to participate in work, training or education. We welcome the efforts to progress young offenders through to work placements and the increased attention to establishing strong links with employers in the community.

The committee is pleased to have seen an increase in the work with prisoners’ families over the year. Three new Family Contact Officer posts are key to supporting positive family involvement in the rehabilitative process and helping to prevent future offending. Their work has included the development of bonding visits and regular support for family members visiting prisoners. The work of the Link Centre in providing family visits is also to be commended in this respect .The Committee is pleased to have continued representation on the Children and Families Group that oversees and improves Polmont’s practice in relation to supporting and encouraging contacts with families.

The Committee was shocked and saddened by the death of a young man in custody in December 2010 and extends their sympathy to his family and friends.

The Committee was sorry to see two Governors, Mr McGill and Mr Inglis depart for other SPS posts during the year. We are pleased to maintain a positive working relationship with Governor Mrs Donegan and thank her and all staff for the assistance and courtesy accorded to us in the carrying out of our duties.



**Alastair MacKinnon**

Chairman

## **SECTION 4**

### **Healthcare and Mental Health**

The establishment continues to offer wide ranging and high quality health facilities and services which are now well established in state of the art premises. This year has seen the appointment of a fully qualified dermatology nurse and the subsequent setting up of a skin clinic.

Polmont has the only full time Sexual Health Nurse within the SPS and this specialist function has been recognised beyond Polmont with a presentation being made at the WISH (Wellbeing in Sexual Health) Conference .

The Mental Welfare Commission carried out an inspection of the mental health facilities earlier this year and produced an excellent report of their findings.

### **Food**

This was the first full year of operation of the new kitchen. The improved facilities and capacity have permitted greater use of fresh ingredients and less reliance on pre-prepared foods. It is regrettable however that by March the training kitchen was still not operational.

There were few concerns expressed by prisoners about the quality and quantity of the food. This is in part due to bread being freely available. More prisoners than before are opting for brown rather than white bread. Fresh fruit is also being provided which is popular on the whole. The prison has been working hard to improve the nutritional value of food by, for example, reducing the availability of chips, and has achieved the Healthy Living Award. However, the daily budget permitted per prisoner -£2.22- makes further improvements very difficult.

Menus run on a four week cycle and are reviewed in the light of feedback from the quarterly food focus groups with prisoners.

The meal arrangements at week-ends are in our view unsatisfactory. On Saturday and Sunday brunch is served at 10:00 and the evening meal at 4pm. This means that there is no food served between 4 pm on Saturday and 10:00 am on Sunday. A light snack pack is provided on a Friday evening to supplement the weekend meals. Most prisoners have already eaten this by part-way through Saturday. Those that can afford it, top up with purchases from the canteen, mostly sweets, and those that can't, go hungry. Eighteen hours is a very long time for anyone, but particularly this age group, to go without food and we are told it contributes to bullying and bad behaviour. We have registered our concerns with the Governor.

On a more positive note, communal dining is being extended throughout the establishment. Prisoners welcome this and there has been very little bad behaviour. One prisoner said that eating together was how you would eat with your family or your mates and that eating on your own was like 'feeding a dog.. you just wolf it'.

### **Equality and Diversity**

The Scottish Prison Service is fully committed to promoting equality. Within HMYOI Polmont this policy is promoted by the Equality & Diversity Group whose work aims to further strengthen progress towards promoting equality amongst its Staff and Young Offenders. This Group meets quarterly and the minutes are circulated to staff, published on SharePoint and displayed on the visitors' notice board. A member of the Visiting Committee sits on the group. Events this year have included a whole day Equality & Diversity event as well as a multi-cultural Chinese Burns day! Motherwell College produced a play with a group of YOs who were

finalists in the Show Racism the Red card. Classes for YOs for whom English is not their first language are proving to be very popular with YOs from Hong Kong and China.

### **Education, Training and Work**

Motherwell College has been responsible for the provision of Education. There has been a wide variety of subjects as in previous years. Awards from SQA, REHIS (Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland) and Motherwell College certificates were issued for an impressive range of subjects. Two YOs who came to Polmont just before their SQA examinations were supported and, by allowing Polmont to become an 'alternative venue', sat their exams. Some very innovative ideas and events have taken place as motivation for YOs to participate in learning. A group of YOs were involved in a project which saw them partner The Scottish Ensemble musicians. The concert was recorded and featured the next day on BBC Radio Scotland. Artists from the National Galleries of Scotland worked in the Learning Centre to help YOs produce life size images of themselves. This gives YOs the time to reflect on how others see them and how they are perceived. A RAP project saw Darren McGarvey aka LOKI work with a group of disaffected YOs writing and performing lyrics. The project retained all learners from beginning to end. VOICEMALE, a collaboration with the National Youth Choir of Scotland produced songs written and performed by YOs. A short film 'Living on a Knife Edge' was produced; 'Patched' a drama/documentary was made with the charity Spirit Aid and both were featured along with VOICEMALE at a concert in the summer. 'Living on a Knife Edge' won a Platinum award at the Koestler Awards, where a total of 15 awards went to Polmont YOs, all of a very high standard. Over the year Polmont has launched a Radio Station run mostly by YOs. They have been assisted by staff to write scripts, conduct interviews (including with our Chairman), record and edit material. There has been more such work all of which helps to provide the impetus for YOs to return to mainstream education.

There are a multitude of in-house programmes from Writer in Residence and two reading groups, through to Yoga. Vocational training and work are provided in a plethora of workshops. Laundry continues to provide an effective service as does the packing plants and gardens. Industrial cleaning still proves to be a popular choice. The work and training activities taken up by YOs is of various kinds. Some, such as the laundry, industrial cleaning and garden maintenance, are core services to the establishment and crucial to ensure its smooth day to day operation, while the training workshops e.g. joinery, bricklaying or forklift driving, focus on offering vocational courses and awards to individual participating YOs. There is also a third kind of work activity, now including the kitchen and waste management, that offer a combination of delivering key service functions and providing recognised training for participating YOs.

Over the year staff have put much effort into developing training opportunities and qualifications that will be recognised and valuable to have on release into the community. It is unfortunate that it is still not possible for full SVQs to be offered to trainees in the building trades because, from within the establishment, it is not possible for the YOs to gain the experience of conventional building site work which is one of the qualifying requirements. Training in the kitchen, however, does provide all the necessary components to meet the SVQ standards. During the year a new workshop was being planned in conjunction with the *Bike Station* in Edinburgh to maintain and repair bikes. Also at the planning stage is a purpose built waste management unit to extend the establishment's good recycling record and make the vacated workshop space available for new or extending other training opportunities.

## **Residential Accommodation**

Accommodation at Polmont is provided in three house blocks: Iona Hall, Munro Hall and Blair House. There is also the Dunedin Unit, which is the segregation facility with accommodation for 15 prisoners.

Iona is a three storey residential hall and is now the oldest of the accommodation units at Polmont. Numbers vary at around 270. Level 1 and often up to half of Level 2 house remand YOs.

Munro Hall, with accommodation for 350 YOs, is a four storey residential unit. The hall is large and each level is divided into two by grille gates with a central hub desk that serves both sides of that floor. Out of cell dining is offered as part of the developing regime to encourage YOs to take advantage of the opportunity to be out of their cells more often.

Blair House is a two storey unit for up to 130 under-18 YOs, which opened in November 2009. Blair House's regime is based on positive relationships and the building of confidence, responsibility and opportunity. Social dining has been successfully introduced on a voluntary basis and a growing number of YOs are choosing to dine in association with fellow YOs. The hall provides a wide range of in-house education and training opportunities. Cleanliness both in-house and externally are of a high standard. The hall is entirely non-smoking and that continues to produce challenges.

The standard of YO accommodation at Polmont is good. The halls are routinely cleaned and good efforts are made to maintain them in an acceptable condition. There is an on-going programme of room and hall redecoration. In the course of the year this has included a large percentage of furniture replacement in Iona.

Industrial cleaning does a good job of maintaining high standards throughout the residential accommodation.

## **Prison Estate & Administration**

In budgetary terms the year was again very challenging and compared to the previous year savings of approximately 2% were required. These were achieved through a combination of further efficiency measures and delays in the start of some initiatives.

The Visiting Committee are pleased to report that funding was provided for three Family Contact Officers at Polmont to enhance family contact and involvement in offender management.

Staffing issues generally have been well controlled despite the influence of planning for the staffing of the new Low Moss premises which will require the redeployment of some experienced members from Polmont. Recruitment of new and adequately trained specialist staff is ongoing to ensure supervision of the young offenders and it is pleasing to note yet a further reduction in staff sickness levels, all of which reflects the commitment to maintain a high standard of personnel at Polmont.

The dedication of staff in maintaining the welfare of the young offenders has been recognised this year by gaining the Bronze Award for Healthy Working Lives.

As with any large establishment where there is a frequently changing population, the maintenance of the estate is demanding. Externally, the grounds are now well established and maintained often with the assistance of suitably qualified young offenders. It is unfortunate, at a time of budget pressures and when the premises are relatively new, that much time and expense is required to redecorate and repair not only prisoner residential areas but also public visiting areas.

## **Link Centre and Activities**

The Link Centre is an important part of the day time activities provision within Polmont. The Centre has been well established for a number of years and is highly regarded with committed staff.

Induction is a key and crucial function and the sessions are delivered in an informal and informative way. Family visit sessions are an important opportunity to reassure young offenders' relatives about

the care and facilities that are provided to their young men whilst in custody. These operate at a variety of times so as to best ensure that families can participate. The wide range of activities that take place under the auspices of this function are crucial to the successful carrying out of the young offender's sentence.

## SECTION 5

### Additional Issues to report

There are no additional issues to report

## SECTION 6

### The Work of the Visiting Committee

The Visiting Committee is made up of twelve members. The Visiting Committee normally hold eight committee meetings per year, and operate a rota method for undertaking regular visits and to deal with young offenders' requests/applications. Committee members are volunteers, appointed by the Justice Minister and come with a range of backgrounds, experience and knowledge. The Committee dealt with 36 individual requests from young offenders over the course of the year, the same as in 2009- 10, and made 80 visits to the prison. In the course of these visits, a variety of matters concerning prison conditions and young offenders' welfare arise (see table below), and these are reported to the Committee and discussed, where necessary with the prison management.

The Committee has been pleased to welcome speakers to its meetings on a number of occasions throughout the year and Polmont VC members continue to take part in training and events organised by the Association of Visiting Committees in Scotland.

### Table of requests to see the Visiting Committee

Subject	2010/11
Accommodation	1
Diversity related	2
Education/training/work	2
Estate issues (conditions)	4
Family/visits	2
Food	0
Health related	1
Inter-establishment transfers	3
Personal property	4
Staff/prisoner related	10
Miscellaneous	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

Visiting Committee Statistics	
	2010/11
Recommended complement of VC members	12
Number of VC members at start of the reporting period	12
Number of VC members at end of the reporting period	12
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	0
Number of VC members leaving within the reporting period	0
Total number of VC committee meetings during reporting period	7
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	9.2
Total number of applications/complaints received	36
<b>Total number of visits to the prison</b>	<b>80</b>

<b>Visiting Committee Members 2010/2011</b>	<b>No. of visits made in reporting period</b>
Alastair MacKinnon	12
Shirley Wherrett	12
Helen Finlayson	5
Ian Adam O.B.E., Q.F.S.M.	8
Marion Pagani O.B.E.	1
Joan Fraser	11
Marcia Ramsay	2
Laurie Naumann	6
Jan Bruntisfield JP	5
Bob Mitchell JP	9
Morag Wilson	6
Shirley McAleer	3
<b>Total number of visits made (not including Committee meetings)</b>	<b>80</b>

ENDS.