

The Visiting Committee

HMYOI Polmont

Annual Report 2012

## **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 2011 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 personnel 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 only 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 2012.

Polmont is an impressively modern prison, with a high standard of accommodation, prisoner services and facilities. There is a dedicated under 18s hall, Blair House

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

Carnegie 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

Alcoholics Anonymous

Glasgow addictions service

Barnardo's - Youth Work

Radio Station

Positive Pooches (The Dogs Trust) behaviour therapy

#### **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

## **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 numbers of young offenders committed to custody in Scotland, despite the falling crime rate in Scotland and to the continuing use of short-term sentences.

The Committee continues to be concerned at the levels of violence perpetrated by young offenders; the vast majority being violence directed towards other prisoners. We recognise that management and staff are fully aware of the need to effectively address this.

Many encouraging initiatives have been undertaken throughout the year involving the arts, drama and music. The sense of achievement and self –esteem that these can engender in those participating is extremely valuable.

The Visiting Committee and senior management team held a very successful ‘Think Tank’ meeting during the year, at which a range of strategic and operational matters were discussed. Inputs to Visiting Committee meetings have included information sessions on the Youth Work provision, on the work of the Family Contact Officers, the Link Centre, and the Psychology service.

Also during the reporting year, Polmont marked its Centenary with an impressive exhibition curated by Alan Hamilton.

Whilst the Committee commends 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. The operation of workshops is too often interrupted, in our view, due to staff absence, shortage or logistical reasons. We also 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 recognise the ongoing 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 the positive work undertaken with prisoners’ families over the year. The Family Contact Officer posts support positive family involvement in the rehabilitative process and helping to prevent future offending. This is a vital resource that requires to be sustained. The work of the Link Centre in providing family visits is also to be commended. 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 during this year and extends their sympathy to his family and friends.

We have been 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**

### **REPORT ON PRISON AREAS**

#### **Healthcare and Mental Health**

On 1st November responsibility for Healthcare and addictions was transferred from the SPS to Forth Valley Health Board. This was in line with what was happening throughout the country. This transfer appears to have gone well and was described by one senior member of staff as being 'almost seamless'. It is clear that the high level and wide ranging services previously available have been maintained and no Young Offender has suffered as a result of the transfer either during its implementation or since.

A new Healthcare IT system Vision replaced the existing one GPass in May and is operating smoothly.

A diverse programme of Mental Health interventions continues to be offered and a recent visit by the Mental Welfare Commission resulted in a very positive report.

#### **Food**

The welcome development this year was the long-awaited opening of the training kitchen. It started operating in July 2011 and has training places for 4 Young Offenders at any point. Up to 10 Young Offenders can be trained altogether. There is demand for places and training to SVQ Level 1 Standard takes around 6 months.

The number of formal concerns expressed by prisoners about the quality and quantity of the food remains low. However, concerns about quality, and especially quantity, are raised on a frequent basis in the course of Visiting Committee Rota Visits. We have raised this with the Governor who feels that the daily budget permitted per prisoner -£2.24- makes further improvements very difficult. She intends to make a Business Case to have the budget for Young Offenders increased to reflect their need for larger portions than adults. The level of dissatisfaction with quality and quantity was borne out by the 2011 prisoner survey.

Menus run on a four week cycle and are reviewed in the light of feedback from the quarterly food focus groups with prisoners. Towards the end of the year, the Governor was examining whether to change to a three week cycle.

We have continuing concerns about the meal arrangements at week ends which are in our view unsatisfactory. On Saturday and Sunday brunch is served at 10am and the evening meal at 4pm. This means that there is no food served between 4 pm on Saturday and 10am 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. This is not surprising given that in a school setting, it is widely accepted that sufficient food of the right quality is essential for effective learning and good behaviour. The same is likely to be true of prisoners, especially young offenders.

We have again registered our concerns with the Governor.

Communal dining is becoming more common throughout the establishment. Prisoners welcome this and there has been very little bad behaviour. A memorable comment from one prisoner was 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. The aim within Polmont and all establishments is to ensure that discrimination or disadvantage on grounds of colour or race, or any other form of discrimination, plays no part in the way prisoners are treated.

Religious and any associated dietary requirements are provided for, and a range of external religious bodies provide services to their adherents.

Quarterly meetings of the Equality and Diversity Committee take place and a member of the Visiting Committee sits on the committee. At one meeting a presentation on the Equality and Diversity Act was delivered and the group were briefed on the nine protected characteristics included in the legislation.

## **Education, Training and Work**

On 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011 Motherwell College ended its Educational contract with Polmont, the new contract having been awarded to Carnegie College. This meant movement and change of resources, change of staff and a different learning environment. All in all a difficult time with Polmont staff working to minimise disruption. It has taken some time for the new system to settle down. Carnegie have both tutors and classroom assistants; the latter do seem to have been beneficial to individual prisoners and encouraged them to apply themselves to the learning more freely.

Apart from conventional educational programmes, participation in a wide variety of learning experiences such as Writer in Residence Creative Workshop, Anne Frank Scotland Project, Polmont Centenary Celebrations, the Radio Station 24/7 broadcasts, have all helped Young Offenders to improve their literacy and confidence.

The length of learning sessions remains an obstacle. Efficiency of movement around the prison prohibits shorter lessons.

It is disappointing that the library has been closed for most of the year since the departure of the librarian. The library was previously well used and this is a valuable resource which is being unutilised. Towards the end of the year the Governor put in place a temporary trolley service in two of the halls but Monro still had no access to the library.

The development of work related activities and the associated training for Young Offenders, so crucial to their wellbeing and progress in the establishment, continued throughout the year. The debate continues about whether workshop groups should be mixed i.e. containing both new recruits exploring the available opportunities and those committed to gaining qualifications. Finding the appropriately qualified and experienced staff has not always been easy and resulted in workshops being closed for limited periods, but credit should be granted to those in the instructor posts for their commitment and enthusiasm.

The training kitchen is now fully operational contributing both to the routine provision of meals and undertaking commissioned specialist catering tasks e.g. for internal events in the establishment. The ability to employ longer term Young Offenders, which was not possible in the temporary kitchen, has meant that individuals are now again able to complete the vocational training programmes.

By the end of March the specialist bike workshop, a collaborative venture with the *Bike Station*, an external social enterprise, was fully operational and proving to be popular with Young Offenders and providing useful recognised training skills. Over 500 bikes had been refurbished and serviced in the first year of operation.

Efforts continue to be made to increase the number of programmes leading to National Progression Awards and Scottish Qualifications Agency certification. Their requirements do not always fit in with what can be provided within a closed environment and the Young Offenders are sadly not always sufficiently motivated or, perhaps, aware of the possible advantages of persevering to achieve a qualification despite the skills, enthusiasm and commitment of the instructors and other activities staff. One incentive has been to reward those who succeed in obtaining recognised qualifications, in their pay. The success of this incentive is still to be evaluated, but made more difficult by the still limited feedback received from and about ex-Young Offenders once they have been discharged into the community.

### **Residential Accommodation**

Polmont Young Offenders Institution consists of three residential blocks: Iona, Monro and Blair. Some halls have pool tables in the central space. All levels have a pantry for food service, also showers, a mini gym and interview rooms. Social dining has been introduced and is operating well. Fixed tables and chairs are in place. All cells have flat screen TVs. Floors in Iona and Monro are divided in 2 by lockable grill gates with a central hub in the middle.

In the reporting year concerned the configuration of accommodation was as follows:

#### **Iona**

A three storey residential block. Level 1 holding untried prisoners. Level 2 - short term convicted and untried prisoners. Level 3 - mostly long term convicted and some short term convicted. There is accommodation for approximately 270 prisoners.

#### **Monro**

A four storey block. Level 1 and 2 hold short term convicted. Level 3 - short term convicted and National top end prisoners. Level 4 - long and short term protection prisoners, sex offenders and some untried. Numbers average 350.

#### **Blair**

A 2 storey block containing 137 spaces for under 18s opened in 2009. The floors are linked by a central open staircase. The regime is based on positive relationships and the building of confidence and responsibility. The hall provides a wide range of in house education and training opportunities. The standard of cleanliness is high. The hall is non smoking and this can be difficult for some young men.

#### **Dunedin**

A self-contained segregation unit with 15 separate cells and a small exercise yard; there are no televisions in cells.

Industrial Cleaning does a very good job maintaining hall cleanliness to a high standard. There is a rolling programme of hall redecoration and furniture upgrading. Half of a programme to fit restrictors to cell windows has been completed. This has made a huge difference to the amount of rubbish on the ground. Safety flooring has been put down in the showers and floor replacement has been completed in other areas.

### **Prison Administration and Estate**

May 2011 saw the appointment of Mrs Donegan as Governor, and the departure of a number of supernumerary operational staff, many of whom had been recruited in advance of the opening of the new Low Moss establishment. The replacement of experienced staff by new recruits was ongoing and to a high standard, with two recruits achieving the distinction of best recruits in their respective

courses at the Scottish Prison College. Staff changes are likely to need time to settle in, particularly within the Halls where it takes time to acquire operational experience but the Visiting Committee observe a continuing commitment to the care of the Young Offenders by all staff. This view was endorsed by the achievement of the Silver Standard for Healthy Working Lives which was an advance on the previous year's level of Bronze.

Staff absence due to sickness continues to reduce and the Governor now visits those on long term absence to ensure that they are being properly supported.

Financially, the establishment was faced with ongoing pressures particularly as the result of inflation costs for food and utilities provision of around £45,000. It is unfortunate that this is compounded by significant daily fluctuations to the prison budget as the number of youngsters held in custody varies despite overheads such as heating and contractual costs being fixed.

Reference is frequently made to the desire to have Offenders involved in activities within the Institution which may increase their skills and be of benefit on liberation. During the year an initiative that required modest funding from within the budget was the formation of a new work group where the Young Offenders learn various basic engineering skills through the repair of bicycles.

Ongoing assessments are made to ensure that the estate is fit for purpose and after some initial successful trials to improve the integrity of cell windows in respect of confining noise and litter which could also affect neighbouring premises. A business case has been made for additional funding.

The newly constructed waste management unit was completed and entered into operation in March. New equipment is being introduced which should help to ensure that Polmont's leading recycling record among Scottish penal establishments, in terms of waste that is recycled and income generated, is further enhanced. The experience for Young Offenders and training qualifications gained should help to ensure employment opportunities for them in the community where recycling is a growth business. Decisions are still to be taken about the future use of what is becoming the former waste management workshop, and the Committee looks forward to welcoming new employment and training opportunities for Young Offenders.

### **Link Centre and Activities**

The Link Centre is an important part of the daytime 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. Committee members are volunteers, appointed by the Justice Minister and come with a range of backgrounds, experience and knowledge. The Visiting Committee normally holds eight committee meetings per year, and operates a rota method for undertaking regular visits and to deal with young offenders' requests/applications. In this

reporting year the Visiting Committee held seven meetings. The Committee dealt with 18 individual requests from young offenders over the course of the year, and made 73 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.

Committee members undertake annual training provided by the Institution in breakaway techniques. All members are able to carry keys and go around the Institution independently.

Polmont Visiting Committee members continue to take part in training and events organised by the Association of Visiting Committees in Scotland and over the course of the year have been actively engaged in the Scottish Government consultations on the future of independent prison monitoring in Scotland.

#### Table of requests to see the Visiting Committee

Subject	2011/12
Inter-establishment transfer	2
Family/visits	1
Personal Property	3
Staff/Prisoner related	1
Miscellaneous	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

Visiting Committee Statistics	
	2011/12
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
Total number of applications/complaints received	18
Total number of visits to the prison	73

Visiting Committee Members 2011/2012	No. of visits made in reporting period
Alastair MacKinnon	9
Shirley Wherrett	6
Helen Finlayson	7
Ian Adam O.B.E., Q.F.S.M.	9
Marion Pagani O.B.E.	4
Joan Fraser	8
Marcia Ramsay	-
Laurie Naumann	6
Jan Bruntisfield JP	6
Bob Mitchell JP	6
Morag Wilson	6
Shirley McAleer	6
<b>Total number of visits made (not including Committee meetings)</b>	<b>73</b>

ENDS.