

The Visiting Committee

HMYOI Polmont

Annual Report 2013

## **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;

**SECTION 1**  
**CONTENTS**

Section 1	Contents
Section 2	HMYOI Polmont
Section 3	Executive Summary
Section 4	Report on Prison Areas
Section 5	Additional Issues to Report
Section 6	The Work of the Visiting Committee

## SECTION 2

### HM YOI POLMONT

Polmont Young Offenders Institution is situated in central Scotland, close to the town of Falkirk. It is the major establishment in Scotland holding sentenced young offenders and remanded young men under 21 years of age. In the year under review young women prisoners from Cornton Vale have also been held at Polmont whilst renovations are undertaken at Cornton Vale. This report covers the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

Polmont is an impressively modern prison, with a high standard of accommodation, prisoner services and facilities.

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 continue to 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

Paws for Progress (The Dogs Trust) behaviour therapy

The Bike Exchange

## SECTION 3

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Committee is pleased to present their report for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

HMYOI Polmont is an important establishment within the Scottish criminal justice landscape and the element of the population that it caters for presents many challenges. The Committee recognises that this has been a year in which considerable criticism was made of aspects of the operation and management of HMYOI Polmont by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland. The Committee is assured that the Governor and her staff are committed to addressing the recommendations of the report in full. The Committee believes that Polmont continues to provide a high level of custody, care, support and intervention to young offenders and those remanded there in custody.

Whilst the management of the prison has remained, at all times, professional and the safe custody of prisoners has been assured, we have regretted the frequent changes of senior management posts at Polmont, including at Governor in charge level. It can, in our view, only be to the detriment of both prisoners and staff when different management priorities are introduced and operational practices and strategic directions are altered too often.

The Committee is impressed at how well managed the arrival and settling of women prisoners from Cornton Vale was undertaken. The initial concern that Polmont young men would be disadvantaged by moving their accommodation from the newest block, does not appear to have been a major issue. Staff and management are to be commended for their planning and implementation.

Whilst numbers have fluctuated over the year, and indeed have been in comparison with recent years, low, the Committee remains concerned at the numbers of young men committed to custody 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 sport, the arts, and encouraging positive community relations. The sense of achievement and self esteem that these can engender in those participating is extremely valuable.

The Committee is interested in and warmly welcomes the approach that is being put forward by Governor Sue Brookes to 'create a learning environment' in Polmont and to support the educational and development outcomes for young offenders in line with the national outcomes for young people. Much work is being undertaken to support this strategic development and the Committee will be keenly following the progress of this work in the coming year.

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 concern. Remand prisoners are a particular concern in this regard, as many will spend weeks or months without work or purposeful activity. The Committee's views on this issue were made known in its contribution to the Scottish Parliament's Inquiry into Purposeful Activity in prisons.

Workshops, in our view, have too often operated with small numbers below their capacity or have been closed due to staff absence or vacant posts.

We also remain concerned about the amount of time that YO's can spend watching television in their cells, especially throughout the night - with some prisoners then being unfit to participate in work, training or education.

We commend the ongoing efforts to progress young offenders through to external work placements and the increased attention to establishing strong links with employers in the community.

The Committee is pleased to have seen the continuing positive work undertaken with prisoners' families over the year. The work of the Family Contact Officers is very much valued and we are pleased that they have been returned to their full complement. The work of the Link Centre in many areas, including providing family visits is also to be commended.

We remain concerned, but hopeful, that the needs of young prisoners with literacy and numeracy issues will be given increasing attention.

The Committee believes that it is important to have representation on internal working groups within the prison and encourages the continuation of this where appropriate.

The Committee is pleased to report on the initiatives to increase focus on substance misuse issues and the formation of the multi-disciplinary Substance Misuse Team.

The Committee was pleased to have representatives meet with Prof Andrew Coyle whilst he undertook his review of the Cabinet Secretary's proposals for independent prison monitoring. I was also pleased to meet with Brigadier Hugh Monro, HMCIP as part of his inspection visit to Polmont. The Justice Committee visited Polmont in the course of the year.

The Committee continued to be active in the work of the Association of Scottish Prison Visiting Committees and I would especially thank VC member Joan Fraser on behalf of the Committee for her exceptional work in this regard.

VC members were required to undertake a revamped safety training along with other non-uniformed staff in the establishment.

The Committee declined in numbers as the year progressed and some members, including myself have chosen to leave the Committee at the end of the reporting year. The uncertainty over the future of Visiting Committees and a sense that the VC role was no longer as valued as it has been, undoubtedly contributed to the loss of experienced members.

I would record my grateful thanks to my Vice Chairman, Shirley Wherrett, to our Clerk, Helen Finlayson, and to long standing members Ian Adam and Bob Mitchell who left at the end of this reporting year. It has been a huge privilege over many years to work alongside them and the other dedicated Committee members.

Despite the challenges and changes throughout the year, we have been pleased to maintain a positive working relationship with Governors Kate Donegan and Sue Brookes, and thank them 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**

The change of health care service provision to the NHS has proceeded with very little impact on prisoners. It is clear that the high level and wide ranging services previously available have been maintained. During the year, the Committee were sorry to see the manager, Sandra Hands, and Paul Kane leave after many years successfully managing the service. A new manager is in place. The transfer of female prisoners to Polmont also created a new set of different demands for the health care team.

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

It remains a matter of concern to the Committee that there are young people who clearly have a range of mental health conditions, often co-existing alongside substance misuse issues held within the establishment and that despite staff's best efforts and care, their welfare cannot be best served in a prison setting.

#### **Food**

The number of formal concerns expressed by prisoners about the quality and quantity of the food remains low. However, concerns about quality and more frequently about quantity, are raised in the course of Visiting Committee Rota Visits. An improvement took place with regard to weekend food provision in that the snack packs are now issued on a Saturday rather than on a Friday night. Complaints about the low protein content of the diet have been made to VC members by some YOs particularly those who are keen to maintain a fit and healthy physique through exercise.

Communal dining is becoming more common throughout the establishment.

Food focus groups are operating in Polmont and their recommendations and comments are well received. Menus run on a three week cycle and are reviewed in the light of feedback from the quarterly food focus groups with prisoners. The training kitchen has been well received by those YOs undertaking qualifications. There is demand for places and training to SVQ Level 1 Standard takes around 6 months. The menu system and information sections are published on the Polmont share point site.

#### **Equality and Diversity**

The Scottish Prison Service is 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.

A resident Muslim Imam was appointed during the year.

Meetings of the Equality and Diversity Committee take place and a member of the Visiting Committee has from time to time attended the committee.

## **Education, Training and Work**

Carnegie College provide a wide range of learning opportunities in Polmont alongside external partners and agencies . Carnegie have both tutors and classroom assistants; the latter have been beneficial to individual prisoners and encouraged them to apply themselves to the learning more freely.

The Committee welcomes the increased focus on literacy and numeracy, and the development of the Learning and Skills Panel which will be responsible for driving this area of work. The focus on improving basic skills along with links to employability is welcomed.

Projects that have been undertaken include the ‘Money for Life ‘projects , looking at links between practical budgeting, food purchasing, managing finances and other useful everyday skills.

Vocational training workshops continue to offer certificated training opportunities, and external verification visits have taken place to ensure that Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) standards are met. 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.

The Committee was delighted to see the library resume full operation after a prolonged closure and commends the work of the enthusiastic officer, who has led the development. The response from YOs has been very positive and we look forward to seeing the exciting prospects that it heralds. The radio station in Polmont is another commendable venture that provides information, entertainment and skills development for YOs. It is well run and innovative.

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.

The Young Enterprise Scotland work has continued in the establishment with businesses run by the YOs and the ‘profits’ being disbursed to charities. The Committee commends this work as a valuable learning experience in both running a business and contributing to valuable causes.

The Bike workshop that began last year is fully operational and proving to be popular with Young Offenders and providing useful recognised training skills. This is a partnership with the Robertson Trust and Youth Scotland .Over 500 bikes had been refurbished and serviced in the first year of operation. Mention too must be made of the Paws for Progress dogs project that has had the enthusiastic support of YOs and staff.

Work opportunities for the women prisoners from Cornton Vale included the laundry, ILU , IT and the VT painters.

A wide range of offending behaviour programmes and psychological interventions are offered in Polmont in addition to one to one case work.

Group work includes drug, alcohol , youth justice, and offending behaviour programmes and are run by both psychology and uniformed staff members.

The Youth work service in Polmont delivers a range of innovative and attractive programmes for the young men including work on anti-sectarianism, peer education and knife crime, food and health, a music group, film project, and an equality and diversity group. We were particularly glad to see the efforts made to support the increased work of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Awards Scheme in Polmont and

commend the efforts of all involved to make the 'expedition' element possible within the limits of a secure environment of another establishment.

### **Residential Accommodation**

Polmont Young Offenders Institution consists of three residential blocks: Iona, Monro and Blair. All Halls have pool tables and table tennis tables in the central space. All levels have a pantry for food service, also showers, a mini gym and interview rooms.. Fixed tables and chairs are in place. All cells have flat screen TVs. At the end of the reporting year concerned the configuration of accommodation was as follows:

*Iona:* A three storey residential block

*Monro:* A four storey residential block.

*Blair:* The most recent residential block . At the time of writing the population includes women prisoners on transfer from Cornton Vale ..

*Dunedin:* A self-contained segregation unit with 15 separate cells and three small exercise yards; there are no televisions in cells.

### **Prison Administration and Estate**

Kate Donegan left Polmont as Governor in .September 2012 and was replaced by Governor Sue Brookes. A new senior management team has been created.

Visits arrangements have had to be changed to accommodate the women prisoners visits. Initially 3 female visits sessions were incorporated. Three Family Contact officers were in place at the end of the reporting year and continue to be a much valued resource.

A computerised helpdesk system was introduced for reporting faults to the Estates team. This ensures an efficient response to cell services and maintenance issues across the establishment. An emergency call out system operates out of hours. 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. Window restrictors have made a huge difference to the amount of rubbish on the ground outside the Halls.

A major refurbishment of Blair House was undertaken in advance of the women prisoners arriving and the movement of the under 18s to another hall. Wall safes were fitted in all Blair cells and this is an initiative that will be rolled out across the prison if funding permits.

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.

### **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. First offender family visits are especially important and welcomed by families. 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.

The roll out of Core Screening and National Induction to the remand population began in January and this has considerably increased the demands on this function.

## **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 eight meetings.

The Committee dealt with 17 individual requests from young offenders over the course of the year, and made 58 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 remains concerned that VC notices routinely 'disappear' from Hall Notice boards and that a number of staff remain unaware of the Visiting Committee's role. This may have been exacerbated by the prolonged uncertainty about the future of Visiting Committees and of prison monitoring in recent years.

Committee members undertook training provided by the Institution in personal protection training 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. Over the course of the year members have been actively engaged in the Scottish Government's and Professor Coyle's consultations on the future of independent prison monitoring in Scotland.

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

<b>Subject</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
Absence of programme to meet parole	1
Community Placement	1
Closed visits	1
Food and quality	2
Incentives and Privileges	1
Behaviour of officer	1

Cell accommodation with smoker	1
Personal property	1
Difficulties with personal mail	2
Recreation	1
Refusal of SEL	3
Treatment of injuries	1
Orderly room award	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

<b>Visiting Committee Statistics</b>	
	<b>2012/13</b>
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	7
Number of new VC members joining within the reporting period	0
Number of VC members leaving within the reporting period	5
Total number of VC committee meetings during reporting period	8
Average number of attendances at Board meetings during reporting period	8
Total number of applications/complaints received	17
Total number of visits to the prison	58

<b>Visiting Committee Members 2012/2013</b>	<b>No. of visits made in reporting period</b>
Alastair MacKinnon	8
Shirley Wherrett <sup>1</sup>	5
Helen Finlayson <sup>2</sup>	2
Ian Adam O.B.E., Q.F.S.M.	9
Marion Pagani O.B.E.	4
Joan Fraser	8
Marcia Ramsay	4
Laurie Naumann	5
Jan Bruntisfield JP	6
Bob Mitchell JP	4
Morag Wilson	3
Shirley McAleer <sup>3</sup>	0
<b>Total number of visits made (not including Committee meetings)</b>	<b>58</b>

ENDS.

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<sup>1</sup> Resigned wef 31-12-12

<sup>2</sup> Resigned wef 30-06 -12

<sup>3</sup> On leave of absence