



HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS

HMP & YOI CORNTON VALE

INSPECTION: 2-3 FEBRUARY 2005

LAST INSPECTION 4-5 FEBRUARY 2004



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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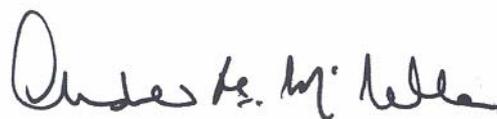
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The visit to HMP & YOI Cornton Vale was made as part of a programme to visit every prison each year in which a full inspection is not being made. In the course of such visits the purpose is to follow up points of note from previous inspections, to examine any significant changes, and to explore issues arising from the establishment's own assessment of itself. It should not be seen as an attempt to inspect the whole life of the establishment.

1.2 The Inspection Team comprised:

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March 2005

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2. PREAMBLE

2.1 This is a short report, based on a third follow up inspection. Cornton Vale Prison and YOI will receive a full inspection early in 2006.

2.2 There is new building work going on and the signs of it are evident. In 2004 it was announced that new accommodation for at least 50 women would be built at Cornton Vale. For prisoners it is hoped that this will provide good living conditions. For staff the new building is seen as a sign of Cornton Vale's future. It is likely that with the opening of this accommodation, the use of HMP Greenock for holding women prisoners in Darroch Hall will cease.

2.3 The energy of the new building project reflects a sense of energy and change at Cornton Vale, some of which is identified in this report. The opening of the new St Margaret's Family Centre provides better opportunities for the involvement of the families of prisoners in the work of the prison and in the lives of the prisoners. There has been some progress in providing a more fulfilling regime for young offenders, although that work is not yet completed. Prisoners living in Bruce House were enthusiastic about the improvement in arrangements for access to toilets at night-time: the improvement is real and necessary.

2.4 Despite the atmosphere of energy and change, some things remain the same. For prisoners in Younger House the arrangements for access to toilets at night are as humiliating and degrading as they were last year. The visit room is no better than it was last year. And the condition of women coming in to the prison is at least as bad as before.

2.5 Last year's report said: *This is not a cross-section of society: these are very damaged women. What will prison do for them?* One year on Cornton Vale holds very many prisoners with a high incidence of drug addiction (estimated 98%), mental health problems (estimated 80%), history of abuse (estimated 75%) and very poor physical health. So it must be said again: *This is not a cross-section of society: these are very damaged women. What will prison do for them?*

2.6 What will prison do for children? Very young children are sometimes in prison when their mothers are imprisoned. During this inspection there was one baby in the prison and

another in one of the Independent Living Units. It is good that mother and baby are together, but it is not good that a baby is in prison. Older children, not yet 16, are sometimes imprisoned when no other accommodation can be found for them. This happened once in the past year. Inspectorate reports regularly draw attention to the inappropriateness of such imprisonment. However well they are treated, prison is no place for 15 year olds.

3. KEY ISSUES AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Security

3.1 There had been no escapes or absconds in the twelve months prior to the inspection.

Estate Development

3.2 Building work has started on a new accommodation block. This will accommodate more than 50 prisoners. This should provide good living conditions for prisoners and also end the use of Darroch Hall in HMP Greenock as accommodation for women.

3.3 Over and above the major investment of adding this new houseblock, Cornton Vale has benefited from significant other investment over the last year. This has included new vehicle access gates, new boilers, a new generator and a new staff training facility and HR department. CCTV has been installed in Bruce House and work was underway during inspection to install it in Younger and Skye. Cells in Peebles and Younger have also been refurbished and the Mother and Baby Unit was being redecorated and refitted during inspection. A bid is also in for funds to do the same in Bruce and Skye. Funding has also been agreed to replace the old night sanitation system with a new one. Along with the new night sanitation, a fire detection system will be installed.

Access to Toilet Facilities

3.4 CCTV has now been introduced in Bruce House. This has improved prisoners' waiting times for access to night sanitation if they are sharing a cell. The women spoke very positively of the difference this had made. Work is underway in Younger and Skye to allow the same access.

Family contact

3.5 The St Margaret's Family Centre was opened on 16 November 2004 – St Margaret's Day. It is situated in the chapel building. Its purpose is to bring family contact under one roof. The Family Contact Development Officers are situated there; the Little Cherubs

playroom is there. Although it has only been open for a few months there are promising signs. A “Partners Day” provided an opportunity for prisoners and their families to meet with organisations which offer them support, like Families Outside and Hope. Ninety seven prisoners took part in the day.

3.6 A number of issues relating to visits were raised in the last inspection. One of these was that the flow of visitors into the prison needed to be improved. There is now a dedicated group of staff to cover visits, and this provides more consistency. However, the waiting room is small, is at best functional and struggles to meet current visitor needs. The increase in population when the new accommodation opens is likely to make this situation worse. Despite the new accommodation having its own visit room, it is likely that the increased number of visitors will still require to be managed through the current inadequate visit waiting room.

3.7 There has been no change to the visits booking system either. Visitors to untried prisoners book their visits, but convicted prisoners still book visits themselves. This is inconsistent and, from prisoner comment, a source of frustration. It is disappointing that three years on this situation is still not resolved. Neither has a booking system for Legal Agents been introduced.

3.8 The inspection report of 2002 recommended that an unambiguous searching procedure in reception should be introduced. A staff searching policy was introduced in September 2004. However, this operates inconsistently and is dependent on staff availability and the commitment of the relevant First Line Managers. There are no dedicated staff for this purpose, so on a regular basis staff are unavailable or are not deployed to this duty. Management were confident at the last inspection that the plans for searching would be adequate to meet the relevant standard. This situation requires to be monitored.

3.9 The design of the gate area still makes searching of visitors difficult. The constraints identified in the last inspection still apply. Plans to refurbish the reception will include moving the X-ray machine to a dedicated room which should provide a more appropriate area for searching and will allow hand luggage to be x-rayed consistently.

3.10 The key issue in all of this is that the prison does not yet have a custom built visit facility. As noted in the last inspection, the visits and waiting room were designed when the population was 100 rather than the 265 at that time. This design issue remains. With the opening of the new accommodation, a minimum of 50 additional prisoners will be held at Cornton Vale. Their visitors will require to be managed through the current waiting room. While the new accommodation has dedicated visits accommodation, visitors will remain at the gate to be escorted to the new area. Additional “official” visitors (legal, social work, outside agencies) can also be anticipated. HMIP will pay close attention to the management of visits and visitors in the next full inspection.

Regime for Young Offenders

3.11 Last year’s report raised a question about the provision of a satisfactory regime for young offenders. The average number of young offenders in Cornton Vale at any one time is 20. Within that number individuals will always be leaving, and others will be coming in. It may be difficult to provide a sustained and structured regime for that number of people. Some welcome steps have been taken by the prison: these include increased access to education; and activities in Skye House like Arts and Crafts and Yoga. Young offenders have been working in eight different work parties. During the inspection there were several positive mentions by staff and prisoners of “Hit Back Drama”, which was solely for young offenders. However, improvements in the regime did not appear to have made a significant difference to the lives of young offenders. Recreation was perceived as inadequate, and programmes were difficult to access for those not doing long sentences. Prisoners in Skye still spoke, as they did last year, about a typical day being “dreary”, and about a typical week being one in which “nothing happened”.

Listener Scheme

3.12 The prison now has seven trained prisoner Listeners. Five are located in the main prison, and two in the Independent Living Units. The Listeners have responded to approximately 70 calls in the last three months.

3.13 The Listeners Scheme is well organised in Cornton Vale. They are well supported by the Samaritans and are an integral part of the prison’s Suicide Prevention Strategy. One

concern for the prison is that as the prisoner population becomes more needy and damaged it is becoming more difficult to identify prisoners with the right qualities and communication skills to take up the role of Listener.

Reception

3.14 Funding has been agreed for a complete refit of the reception. A 16-week refurbishment programme should be completed in time for the opening of the new accommodation. The new design is much better, and when completed it should be fit for purpose.

Fire Prevention

3.15 This issue of a system to hold fire doors open linked to the fire alarm system still affects prisoners in Bruce, Younger, Peebles and, to a lesser extent, Skye. There has been no change to the locking procedures or the make up of the doors since the last report. However, the Inspectorate appreciate that the issue is a difficult one given the competing demands of safety and security: the design of the buildings themselves is unhelpful. On a more positive note it should be emphasised that these doors are electronically locked and unlocked from a central control room, and the addition of CCTV in the units makes for a safer environment. Funding has also been agreed for the introduction of a fire detection system in all wings.

Relationships Programme

3.16 The “Relationships – Connections for Women” programme was designed by staff in Cornton Vale. It is a cognitive behavioural awareness programme designed to provide a safe environment to equip women with the necessary skills to think about their relationships; learn how to problem solve; communicate more effectively; deal with conflict and criticism; and know when and how to ask for help. It involves 6-8 women at a time and has been run three times since it was introduced in April 2004.

Mother and Baby Unit

3.17 At the time of the inspection there were two mothers with babies in Cornton Vale. One was in one of the Independent Living Units which are located outside the prison, the other was in the Mother and Baby Unit. At the time of inspection the Mother and Baby Unit was nearing the end of a comprehensive upgrading which will improve the quality of life there. Plans were in place to have two dedicated members of staff responsible for this Unit and training in childcare and child development for these staff is planned.

3.18 The last inspection report noted that a range of policies and procedures were available relating to the Mother and Baby Unit but that some of these policies should be reviewed. These have not been reviewed although changes have been made.

3.19 A classroom and kitchen have been created in Peebles House where Life Skills are taught. Mothers can access this and the main learning centre.