



HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS

HMP & YOI CORNTON VALE

INSPECTION: 4-6 FEBRUARY 2004

LAST INSPECTION SEPTEMBER 2002



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

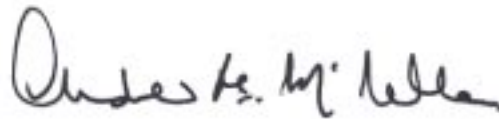
1.1 The visit to HMP & YOI Cornton Vale was made as part of a programme to visit every prison each year in which a full inspection is not being made. In the course of such visits the purpose is to follow up points of note from previous inspections, to examine any significant changes, and to explore issues 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:

Andrew McLellan
Rod MacCowan
David Abernethy

HMCIP
HMDCIP
HMIP

1.3 Jane Lynch from the Care Commission was in attendance to inspect the Mother and Baby Unit.



February 2004

ANDREW R C McLELLAN
HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRISONS

2. PREAMBLE

2.1 "It is quite clear that there are people in prison who don't need to be there and who are being made worse by being in prison and who could benefit from other provisions outside prison." This is the view of Anne Owers, Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales: she was speaking specifically about people with mental illness. Issues of mental health are important in every prison in Scotland: but they are particularly noticeable at Cornton Vale. Eighty per cent of prisoners in Cornton Vale have a history of mental illness. Medical records confirm the impressions formed during even a short inspection, that some of these women are very disturbed indeed.

2.2 The statistics make grim reading. Over 90% of admissions have addiction problems: in one period of assessment the figure was 100%. Over 60% have a history of being abused. This is not a cross-section of society: these are very damaged women. What will prison do for them? It would be impossible to visit Cornton Vale and not to agree with Anne Owers.

2.3 It is unrealistic to expect prison to cure mental illness or to overcome the effects of abuse. A prison is not a psychiatric hospital and it is not an addiction treatment centre, although all prisons have mental health and addiction work taking place within them. This report suggest that the developments in meeting the needs of "poor copers" when they are admitted to Cornton Vale are impressive. The prison has taken considerable care to reduce the dangers of self-harm, and there were no suicides in the period since the last inspection.

2.4 Cornton Vale bears the brunt of the rapid increase in the number of women prisoners in Scotland. In order to relieve the pressure on Cornton Vale 48 prisoners were transferred to Greenock in November 2002. That number remains at Greenock: yet already the numbers in Cornton Vale are higher than they were before that transfer became necessary. In 1990 there were 137 women in prison in Scotland: at the time of the Cornton Vale inspection there were 340. There had been no escapes since the last inspection.

2.5 The last inspection report drew attention to the difficulties of toilet access in some parts of the prison at night and sometimes during the day. This situation is as bad now as it was then. The result in parts of the prison is that over 25% of women who seek access to a toilet at night will have to wait for more than thirty minutes; and some have to wait

considerably longer. In a shared cell with no integral sanitation this can be humiliating and degrading.

2.6 One attractive new feature of Cornton Vale is the Independent Living Unit, which was only opened just before the last inspection. This provides extremely good living conditions for women who have progressed through the prison to “top end”; and also provides opportunities for prisoners to work outside the prison.

2.7 There is much energy at Cornton Vale promoting change. New day care provision with mental health support in Ross House, a new addictions strategy, the refurbishment of Younger Hall and of some of Peebles Hall and the development of the Links Centre are all beginning to make their marks on the lives of prisoners. Even newer developments in a “Families Agenda” and in working on issues of relationships seek to address the needs of the particular population in this prison. There is a clear sense of direction in the management of Cornton Vale. This energy for change, however, is not always without problems. It would not be surprising if some members of staff in the prison found the rate of change difficult and the pressures on them considerable. Moreover, figures show that staff sickness is high. There were hints, even during a follow-up which does not look at every aspect of the prison, that some quite basic activities, like the quality of food and the provision of a productive regime for Young Offenders, were in need of attention.

3. PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND POINTS OF NOTE OUTSTANDING FROM THE LAST INSPECTION OF 9-10 SEPTEMBER 2002

Progress on Recommendations to Justice Department

15.2 A more coordinated strategy to tackle drug misuse should be established (paragraph 8.16).

Achieved. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The Addiction Strategy has now been completed and has been subject to audit. The strategy is comprehensive and impressive. Work is underway to ensure that non-compliance issues are being met. An Addictions Team is in place comprising of an addiction manager, two addiction officers, one addiction nurse, one addiction administrator and one social worker. A comprehensive meeting and communication structure is also in place. Addictions issues are managed by the Addiction Steering Group chaired by the Deputy Governor (Head of Opportunity and Social Inclusion) and attended by all Heads of Function. An addictions assessment referral meeting chaired by the addictions manager takes place three times per week seeing all prisoner referrals and planning both interventions and transitional care.

In the reporting year to date, April 2003-January 2004, of the 1044 referrals to addictions assessment, 532 referrals were dealt with on a one-to-one basis. Alcohol and Drug Awareness courses have also been run.

15.3 A review of access to toilet facilities during patrol periods needs urgently to be implemented (paragraph 14.7).

Not achieved. Prisoners in Bruce House and Younger House who share cells are still experiencing delays in accessing toilet facilities during patrol periods. Records for the two nights 4-5 February and 5-6 February showed that of the 99 requests from prisoners sharing cells to access toilet facilities 27 had to wait more than 30 minutes. Prisoners said that they often used their sink as a toilet. Increased numbers mean that more prisoners are sharing now than during the last inspection and therefore more are subject to these conditions. Young adult prisoners had been moved into Skye House from Younger House the week before the

inspection. These young adults are subject to the same night sanitation arrangements as the adults in Bruce and Younger.

Progress on Recommendations to Operations Director/Governor in Charge

12.4 More listeners should be recruited and response times and problems associated with weekend lock up should be resolved (paragraph 4.50)

Not achieved. The Listener Scheme meets ever-increasing demands. At the time of inspection the number of listeners was lower than it had been for some time (five). Access remains an issue as some listeners are located in the Independent Living Unit and are not normally able to come into the main prison during the evening or at weekends.

12.5 The layout of the reception area should be re-examined to provide more storage space for prisoners' property and ensure that the nurse's station is fit for purpose (paragraph 5.15).

Not achieved. The storage space for prisoners property is under even greater strain due to ever increasing numbers and the nurses are still required to interview admissions in a kitchen.

12.6 The new administrative arrangements associated with the operational needs of the pharmacy contract should be continued and funding for the post secured (paragraph 6.15).

Achieved. Two substantive posts, a Pharmacy Assistant and a Health Care Assistant, have been created.

12.7 A more flexible arrangement for discipline/escort cover on days when the dentist and psychiatrist are both in attendance should be examined (paragraph 6.33).

Achieved. A review of attendance arrangements has taken place, and a dedicated group of staff responsible for discipline cover in the health centre has been created.

12.8 Steps should be taken to introduce an audit of health care standards (paragraph 49).

Achieved. A comprehensive audit tool has been created locally which incorporates elements of SPS national strategy and Clinical Governance requirements. A full audit of health care delivery has been undertaken.

12.9 There should be closer scrutiny of the input from personal officers to the sentence management process to ensure reviews are conducted timeously and realistic targets agreed (paragraph 7.11).

Achieved. The system which is now in place is impressive. A very well developed database produces the prompt for targets which are upcoming, and examination of the database reveals not only the high degree of compliance but also considerable detail in recording details of how individuals have been managed. In turn, the Sentence Management Unit is well organised, with good records and entries of a high quality. The simplification of the assessment system has removed some of the confusion over assessments which was referred to in the last report.

Along with the development of the Links Centre, Sentence Management at Cornton Vale now appears to be working well. Evidence presented shows that targets are consistently met and the Prisoner Survey shows that 72% of prisoners agree to strongly agree that Sentence Management is of value.

12.11 Technology should be introduced to help staff monitor banned visitor lists and provide front line security, and procedures for banned visitors should be detailed in instructions and subject to audit and inspection (paragraph 7.25).

Partially achieved. The national working group has now identified options for access control systems: however, this awaits a central decision. In the interim when the visit list for each session is compiled, this is passed to security where a check of visitors is carried out and any concerns raised in advance with visit staff.

12.12 An unambiguous searching procedure in reception should be introduced (paragraph 7.26).

Not achieved. A Working Group is currently developing a protocol for searching for both staff and prisoners. An Action Plan has been developed for implementation during 2004. Cornton Vale is hindered by the design of the visits area which makes searching difficult. In order to search a visitor, ad hoc use of the agents' visit rooms has to be made. This means bringing visitors from the visit waiting room through the gate security area further into the prison. Much of the layout of the visits area makes it difficult to carry out searching without taking individuals further into the prison. The current site of the room in which the x-ray machine is located is a further example of this. The visits area itself is readily accessible to the main administration corridor and requires prisoners to be brought from the prison into the administration area.

It is likely that the current available facilities will hinder full implementation of the planned protocol. Local management however, are confident that the review currently being undertaken of searching within the establishment will allow the prison to comply with SPS Security Standards.

Progress on Points of Note

13.1 Consideration should be given to a system to hold fire doors open linked to the fire alarm system (paragraph 3.13).

Not achieved. The doors in question exist as both fire and security doors. As fire doors they should be free to be held open, linked to the fire alarm system and able to be closed in case of fire. As security doors they require to be locked in frame at all times. Currently neither happens consistently. Clearly the doors cannot function both as fire doors and security doors. This issue must be resolved.

13.2 Little if any weekend Mandatory Drug Testing takes place because staff shortages and an imbalance of staffing on one division meant that staff were frequently removed from the Drugs Unit. This needs to be addressed. (Paragraph 4.23).

Achieved. Testing now takes place at weekends and the staffing issues which previously existed have been addressed.

13.4 The timing of deliveries to the prison and consequent arrangements for vehicle and staff searching should be examined (paragraph 5.10).

Achieved.

13.5 The flow of visitors into the prison could be improved (paragraph 5.11).

Partially achieved. A move to dedicated staff groups in functional areas should provide a designated group of staff from which visit supervision staff can be drawn. This should have the effect of increasing continuity in the operation of visits. The perceived level of supervision remains an area of considerable criticism.

13.6 A robust system of audit of prisoner complaints should be considered (paragraph 5.19).

Achieved.

13.7 Fire Marshals should be trained (paragraph 5.21).

Achieved. Both Fire Safety Officers have attended the recommended Fire Safety Officer course at the Prison Service College. Fire Marshals have been identified and training is programmed for 2004.

13.8 Accident “near misses” should be reported (paragraph 5.25).

Partially achieved. A system for recording accidents and near misses is in place but statistics indicate that near misses are seldom reported (one in the period April '03 – January '04).

Management are considering ways in which staff can be encouraged to submit reports on near misses.

13.10 More assistance should be given to “poor copers” in Ross House to improve their coping skills (paragraph 7.3).

Achieved. A new induction process better identifies poor copers. The level of mental health nurse involvement at that point and throughout Ross House has been significantly increased. More training in mental health issues is now given to Ross House staff. In addition it is expected that an occupational therapist is about to start working with the poor copers in Ross House.

13.11 Consideration should be given to allowing visitors rather than prisoners to book visits (paragraph 7.24).

Partially achieved. The visitors of untried prisoners now book the visits. Convicted prisoners still book their own visits.

13.12 Consideration should be given to introducing a booking system for Legal Agents (paragraph 7.28).

Not achieved.

13.13 A new custom-built visit facility should be considered as a matter of urgency (paragraph 7.29).

Not achieved. The visits area was designed when Cornton Vale’s population was around 100, rather than the 265 encountered during this inspection.

13.14 Consideration should be given to extending the certification process to a wider range of courses on the curriculum (paragraph 7.36).

Partially achieved. Employment in Cornton Vale is in transition. There are plans to introduce more certificated work opportunities. During the visit prisoners were able to work

towards BICS certification in Industrial Cleaning, and SVQ's in Housekeeping and Food Preparation. As part of induction prisoners also receive certificated training in first aid, manual handling and health and safety. Plans to introduce certificated work in the laundry were at an advanced stage. This is part of the overall strategy to move towards activities that will develop life skills.

13.15 Some negative prison staff attitudes towards the provision of education should be addressed (paragraph 7.37).

Achieved. The appointment of a First Line Manager with specific responsibilities for promoting aspects of education is seen by management of the prison and management of the learning centre as a positive step. It is easier than it was before for remand prisoners to attend education; and the learning centre manager believes that prison staff are now more encouraging of prisoners who want to be educated.

13.16 The range of materials within the library could be extended with a view to developing it into a multi-media resource centre (paragraph 7.38)

Not achieved. There has been no change in the library.

13.17 Staffing of the library should be examined (paragraph 7.38).

Partially achieved. Two prisoner posts have been created in the library. Good support is given by a member of staff from Stirling Council Libraries. But the responsibility for overall management of the library is not clear.

13.18 Staffing levels in the gymnasium should be addressed (paragraph 7.54).

Achieved to the extent that the matter has been fully examined and staff structures have been revised. There is a bigger and more diverse agenda in the gymnasium, and more staff continuity. However, the benefits for prisoners are not yet fully delivered: evening sessions and Saturday morning sessions have been lost. It is hoped that the appointment of Sports and Games Officers will make an improvement: but this has not yet happened.

4. NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Anti Bullying Strategy

4.1 Management and staff were aware of growing levels of violence among female offenders generally and bullying within the prison. Work has been carried out in conjunction with SACRO and the HMYOI Polmont to develop a form of mediation, breaking away from the traditional model of using the disciplinary system to manage bullying. The Difficult Prisoner Working Group responsible for this initiative has completed an action plan and the first awareness sessions for staff have been held. This is potentially a very imaginative initiative.

Induction

4.2 The plans in place to introduce a new induction process and the development of an Induction and Throughcare Centre at the time of the last inspection are now well advanced. A Links Centre has been developed and a new and comprehensive induction package is in place. The induction package runs over two weeks, and is available both to convicted and untried prisoners. Convicted prisoners undergo induction in the Links Centre and untried prisoners in Ross House.

Communications

4.3 A new prisoner job opportunity had been created to co-ordinate communications between prisoners and staff. The Prisoner Communication Assistant works with the Business Improvement Manager to help to get the views of prisoners to influence the overall direction of the establishment. She meets with individual prisoners and groups gathering information and passing on news of new developments or actions from previous requests. **This is an area of good practice.** A copy of the job description for the Prisoner Communication Assistant is attached at Annex 1.

Addictions Strategy

4.4 A new Addictions Strategy is in place and working well. However, methadone prescribing was an issue raised by prisoners. Management accepted that prisoners were issued their prescriptions at different times every day and this had led to some unease

amongst prisoners. Some thought had been given to how prisoners might be issued their methadone at the same time each day but a solution to how this could be managed had not been found.

Independent Living Unit

4.5 An Independent Living Unit was opened shortly after the last inspection. It provides accommodation for 24 women. Living conditions are good and there are increased opportunities for work in the community.

Mother and Baby Unit

4.6 Although the Mother and Baby Unit has been open for some time this was the first time that the Inspectorate was accompanied by a childcare expert seconded from the Care Commission. The Unit accommodates both mothers and babies and also pregnant prisoners. The Unit is linked to Peebles House with a door separating the two areas. The door is left unlocked during the day but is locked in the evening. Prisoners have a key to their own bedroom and have the freedom to use the kitchen and toilet facilities at all times. The accommodation is pleasantly decorated with appropriate facilities. There was continuity of staff to support both mothers and babies. Discussion with staff highlighted that knowledge and skills in childcare come through individual staffs own experience with children. Relevant staff training in childcare and child development should be delivered to staff involved in the Unit.

4.7 On admission to the Unit the Mother and Baby Policy is given to prisoners. This document requires to be updated. Staff members spend time with each woman discussing the policies and procedures within the Unit. The information discussed with each woman should be incorporated into the policy document in order to provide a comprehensive information leaflet. Admission criteria are set, with the final decision as to whether or not a woman can have her baby with her in prison being made by the Governor. A contract is agreed and signed by the woman which states that she will be responsible for her baby at all times. However, if a woman allows a friend or member of staff to hold or monitor the baby for a few minutes then she is in breach of the contract. The contract should be more flexible.

4.8 There are procedures in place to ensure the health and safety of the babies, with risk assessment carried out by staff. An appropriate procedure in the event of a fire or other emergency was reported by staff with thought given to how the baby's needs would be met if the building had to be evacuated. A system is in place to allow named visitors to visit, with risk assessments carried out by staff. Risk assessments should be recorded and reviewed regularly.

4.9 Appropriate case notes were evidenced with discretion maintained throughout. The notes are the same as those used in the community and are forwarded to the relevant medical centre when a baby leaves the prison. There is also information recorded in prison files. There are regular case reviews with identified professionals in attendance and links are maintained with all interested parties in the community. Any medication required by a baby is either prescribed by a G.P. or provided by the prison. The medication is administered by the mother and stored in her own bedroom. The women are encouraged to take their babies out into the fresh air. Boundaries are set as to where babies can be taken, and risk assessments carried out by staff.

4.10 A range of toys are available. The development of the children is monitored through contact with the Health Visitor and routine assessments and immunisations carried out in a local community Health Centre. Opportunities for contact with other family members are available. Arrangements can be made for a family to meet in the 'Little Cherubs' room but the time is currently limited to a two hour visit. It is recognised by staff that extended time would allow visits to be more relaxed and meaningful with possible future development including opportunities for families to prepare and share a meal.

4.11 Due to the women having full responsibility for their babies, they are restricted in the programmes they can access. Some basic programmes are not available, for example budgeting and simple cooking skills. This may have an effect on a woman's ability to care for her child especially when she moves back into the community. Consideration should be given to how women can be taught basic life skills.

4.12 There are a range of policies and procedures available but some of these policies should be reviewed. An example of such a policy is the Child Protection Policy. Although the Mother and Baby Policy refers to babies being with their mothers until age 12 months this

has been flexible taking account of individual circumstances. Currently there is a child aged two years living with her mother in the Independent Living Unit. The mother takes the child to a local nursery and within the boundary of time that she can spend in the community she can take the child to a local park.

Job Description

Title - Prisoner Communication Assistant

Supervision Level - Medium

Wage Scale - 3A £10.80 - £12.00

Main Purpose of the Job

- To communicate with prisoners, seeking views and information for the purpose of driving the business forward through a series of consultations and focus groups. This information will provide the Business Improvement Manager with the necessary background to highlight and action areas of concern and assist to put plans in place to improve communications and our business.

Key Areas of Responsibility

- To organise on a monthly basis a series of focus groups regarding all aspects of prison life with different themes.
- To be responsible for recording the minutes of the monthly business meetings.
- To provide information on a range of prison related issues.
- To provide information to prisoners during the induction process.
- To facilitate and organise the Prisoner Newsletter to be published bi-monthly and facilitate and make all necessary arrangements regarding the Cornton Vale newsletter "Voice of the Vale".
- Photocopying of general administration papers – non-confidential work.
- Updating notice boards across the establishment and putting information out when required.
- Filing for Prisoners Business Improvement and establish systems of filing.
- To undertake tasks deemed necessary by the B.I. Manager.
- Report directly to the B.I. Manager on a daily basis.
- To be actively involved in the Annual Prisoner Survey and including other ad hoc surveys regarding prisoners.

Skills, Knowledge and Experience

Essential

- Sound knowledge of Microsoft Word
- Engaging in Sentence Management process
- Making effort to address offending behaviour
- Essential communication skills
- Excellent organisational skills
- Open-minded when dealing with people at all levels and receptive to others views and opinions
- Health and Safety, Manual Handling, Safe Systems of Work
- Reliable and trustworthy
- Drug free
- Excellent work progress reports
- Good sick record

Desirable

- Good knowledge of the prison system in general but in particular Cornton Vale
- Education qualification in IT/Office skills

Qualification Offered

- European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)
- Higher Information Technology

Disqualifier

- Positive Mandatory Drug Test Result