



HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS

HMP & YOI CORNTON VALE

INSPECTION: 19-20 MARCH 2007



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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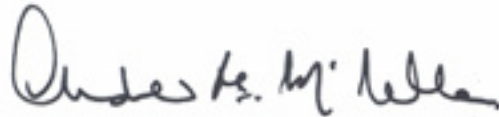
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The visit to HMP & YOI Cornton Vale was made as part of a programme to visit every prison in the year following a full inspection. In the course of such visits the purpose is to follow up points of note from the full inspection, 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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2. PREAMBLE

2.1 More and more women are being sent to prison: more of them are being sent to Cornton Vale; and more of them display the very unhappy combination of factors (bad physical and mental health, addiction, history of abuse) which make Cornton Vale a difficult place to live in and a difficult place to manage. This inspection draws attention to some things which have changed since the last report. But the changes are on a small scale in comparison to the two things which remain the same, and always remain the same, at Cornton Vale: the rising numbers and the dreadful condition of most women when they arrive. A new Governor was appointed in 2006: he said “I am shocked by the high numbers of mentally ill people we have to deal with”.

2.2 A few days before the inspection a fire broke out in Skye House, home to 30 women under the age of 21. As a result the block became uninhabitable and is likely to remain so for many months. A fire can be very frightening for prisoners and for staff alike: despite the severity of the destruction to the building no-one was hurt. Its effects, however, require accommodation to be found elsewhere in the prison for all the 30 prisoners: when prison numbers are very high this puts considerable strain on everyone. Last year’s report welcomed some improvement in the opportunities available to prisoners under the age of 21 to spend their days in useful activities: as a result of the fire this is much more difficult now.

2.3 Serious concerns were raised in the report of 2006 about handcuffing women being taken to hospital about to give birth. At that time assurances were given that the practice had stopped. It has not: the incident described in this report is of a woman handcuffed almost until the point of birth; and then handcuffed immediately afterwards and during every subsequent contact with her unwell baby. Cornton Vale has no control over this practice: but it must not continue.

2.4 Every report published in recent years on any prison where remand prisoners are held comments on the emptiness and boredom of every single day for such people. It was an important comment in the last report, which said *For a remand prisoner, addicted, mentally ill, frightened and separated from her family, time locked in her cell may not only be boring: it may be very threatening.* Since that was written there has been no decrease in the numbers coming into Cornton Vale on remand, so it is no easier to avoid the long lock-up times; and

these remanded women are no less addicted, mentally ill and frightened than they were a year ago.

2.5 In some parts of the prison access to toilets during the night continues to cause upset and difficulty. This is because the electronic locking system limits access to the toilet to one cell at a time. It could be possible for a woman to have to wait for an hour after pressing her bell before she will be given access to the toilet. This is far too long, and some women resort to using their sinks.

3. PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND POINTS OF NOTE

Six Recommendations and forty four Points of Note were made in last year's full inspection report. Progress as follows:

Recommendations

Implemented	0
Partly Implemented	1
Not Implemented	5

Points of Note

Implemented	19
Partly Implemented	15
Not Implemented	10

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 SPS should ensure that women under escort are subject to the level of security appropriate to the risk they present, and that they are treated with reasonable standards of personal dignity and humanity (paragraphs 3.5 and 8.13).

Not implemented. Some initial progress was made following discussions between Cornton Vale and RCS. Agreement was reached, on an informal basis, to the single cuffing of women and the provision of same sex escorting staff. However, this informal agreement was subsequently withdrawn by RCS. Providing same sex escorting staff has continued but double cuffing has again become the norm.

The following case illustrates the Inspectorate's concerns about this issue.

One prisoner's baby was not well enough to leave the local hospital at the same time as its mother. Arrangements were made with the contractor to escort the prisoner to the hospital on a daily basis to allow her to bond with her baby.

The prisoner was low supervision yet the contractor refused to remove the handcuffs despite the fact that the room which they were in had no windows. This meant that the mother was not allowed to hold the baby due to the risk of infection from the handcuffs.

The Inspectorate was also informed of escorting staff refusing to remove handcuffs from a prisoner who was in a full body scanner. This is a further example of the failure of the contractor to carry out individual risk assessments based on needs and circumstances.

11.2 SPS and the Escort Contractor should review the scheduling of escorts (paragraph 5.5).

Partly implemented. Although Cornton Vale prisoners may still have to be picked up early there is evidence that there is an improved flow of prisoners admitted to the prison.

11.3 SPS should engage with criminal justice partners to review the need to escort prisoners to Cornton Vale when there will be no sentence to serve (paragraph 5.7).

Not implemented.

11.4 A more structured approach to pre-release should be developed (paragraph 5.20).

Not implemented. Community Integration Plans are reviewed six months and one month prior to liberation. There are no pre-release programmes although there are some programmes in place to prepare prisoners for progression to the Independent Living Units.

11.5 The facilities in the main visits room should be improved (paragraph 8.5).

Not implemented. Attempts have been made to improve the availability of space by removing tables. However, the area does not readily lend itself to low cost improvements.

11.6 A full assessment should be made of needs within Cornton Vale which might be met by psychology and whether current psychology provision can meet this (paragraph 8.29).

Not implemented.

12. POINTS OF NOTE

12.1 The problem with ant infestation in Younger House should be addressed (paragraph 2.11).

Partly implemented. Infestations still occur in some cells on the ground floor. As soon as they are reported the area is treated. The source of the infestation has not been eradicated.

12.2 Access to the arts and crafts activity room in Younger House should be improved (paragraph 2.13).

Partly implemented. Availability of staff, and resource issues mean that there are still times when this room is restricted. However, there is now more for prisoners to do in the hall: in-cell hobby packs have been introduced and an Entertainments Committee created.

12.3 The “back cells” in Younger House should be fitted with beds, EPIC and integral sanitation (paragraphs 2.14 and 9.3).

Not implemented. The cells are unchanged and are used only as a last resort.

12.4 The establishment should review the appropriateness of using ‘wheelie bins’ to transport prisoners’ personal belongings in Bruce House (paragraph 2.17) and prison laundry generally (paragraph 9.31).

Not implemented. The prison does not accept that the use of ‘wheelie bins’ is inappropriate.

12.5 Staff in the residential units should understand the criteria used for prisoners being upgraded to Peebles House from Bruce House, and participate in the process (paragraph 2.21).

Partly implemented. At the time of the last inspection Wallace House had just been redesignated the local top-end facility. Staff in Peebles House were not used to this. The situation seems to have improved but prisoners still report that they have difficulty understanding the difference in the regime.

12.6 The “back cells” in Skye House should be fitted with beds, EPIC and integral sanitation (paragraphs 2.22 and 9.3).

Not implemented. These cells are unchanged and are used only as a last resort. They are not currently in use as a result of the recent fire.

12.7 The reasons for switching off the telephones in Wallace House at 11.30pm should be examined (paragraph 2.28).

Implemented. The reasons have been examined and management have decided that the current arrangements will remain.

12.8 The establishment should review the practice of leaving the Independent Living Units unlocked during the day when prisoners are inside (paragraph 2.32).

Implemented. Prisoners now have the option of locking the front door when they are in the house.

12.9 The reasons for the increased number of minor prisoner-on-prisoner assaults should be examined (paragraph 3.2).

Partly implemented. Intelligence indicates that most of the assaults occur against the young offenders, remand prisoners or newly convicted admissions. There has been an increase of 100 in the population over the past three years and on a per capita rate the assaults have fallen although the overall total has remained approximately the same since the last report.

12.10 The length of time some women previously held in Inverness, Aberdeen and Dumfries spend in escort vehicles when attending court should be reviewed (paragraph 3.6).

Not implemented. Although spaces can still be made available for women in HMP Inverness, Cornton Vale prisoners may still spend a long time on journeys to court and if it is a trial may have to make these journeys on a daily basis for a week or more.

12.11 The discussions and outcomes from the weekly Custody and Order meetings should be cascaded to all staff (paragraph 3.7).

Implemented.

12.12 Prisoner complaints should be entered on the SPS Prisoner Records System (paragraph 3.11).

Not implemented. A set of guidance notes on how to enter complaint forms on the prisoner record system has been re-issued but complaints are still not being entered on a regular basis.

12.13 The establishment should introduce a more robust audit trail of prisoner complaints (paragraph 3.12).

Not implemented. See comments at paragraph 12.12.

12.14 The process for allocating a prisoner's addiction casework should be clearer (paragraph 4.10).

Implemented. SPS staff are allocated prisoners who need programmes and Phoenix staff deal with one-to-one interventions. Any prisoner with dual diagnosis is referred to the addiction nurse.

12.15 The perception of prisoners that access to addictions services is not to an acceptable standard should be addressed (paragraph 4.11).

Implemented. There is now a more robust communication with the prisoner. Prisoners are normally seen fortnightly or in some cases weekly. All interventions are based on identified need.

12.16 The establishment should encourage local health services to respond to requests for the prescribing of methadone (paragraph 4.12).

Implemented. The prison now has a part-time administrator and three addiction nurses which has improved contact with community GPs. Community GPs are responding much quicker.

12.17 On admission, medical interviews or assessments should be carried out in the Health Centre rather than in the reception area (paragraph 5.2).

Not implemented. Management have decided not to change the current practice.

12.18 There should be consistency in taking prisoners from the reception to the residential areas in the evening (paragraph 5.4).

Partly implemented. The improved flow of admissions into Cornton Vale during the course of the day means that many prisoners are located in the residential areas at an earlier stage. The consistency with which residential staff collect prisoners from the reception is still dependent on staff availability.

12.19 More contact should be made with potential learners during induction (paragraph 5.11).

Implemented. Learning Centre staff have an input to Modules 2 and 3 of the induction process. Entries in the induction folders confirm that this is happening.

12.20 Consideration should be given to allowing long-term prisoners to attend the Local Risk Management Group when their case is being discussed (paragraph 5.15).

Implemented. The ICM process has now changed the practice and the prisoners now have the opportunity to attend.

12.21 The possibility of using the SPS videolink network to facilitate one-to-one interviews by key workers from local prisons to Cornton Vale should be examined (paragraph 5.18).

Implemented. A video link is now located in the Family Centre and is used for ICM and distant family contact.

12.22 The establishment should continue in its efforts to recruit more dental resource (paragraphs 6.17 and 6.18).

Partly implemented. A dentist is still only available once per fortnight. The prison is only 13% compliant with the SPS Healthcare Standard for dental services. The prison management has been in talks with representatives from the NHS and a dentist has been recruited who may be able to provide an additional service. Some funding has been provided by Forth Valley health promotion department for the supply of toothbrushes, toothpaste and the subsidising of healthy options in the prisoners' canteen.

12.23 Learning centre staff and work party officers should liaise more effectively to plan and implement a more integrated approach to the learning activities of prisoners (paragraph 7.3).

Partly implemented. There is a link with hairdressing where the qualification will now be NQ rather than the more challenging SVQ. This will allow those prisoners with shorter sentences to obtain a qualification.

12.24 Consideration should be given to creating an appropriate teaching kitchen to extend and improve prisoners' learning opportunities (paragraph 7.4).

Not implemented.

12.25 The arrangements for the provision of books and magazines from the library should be improved (paragraph 7.5).

Implemented. A new contract has been agreed with the local authority library service.

12.26 Education provision for prisoners with learning difficulties should be improved (paragraph 7.6).

Implemented. Peer tutoring is now available for literacy and ICT. A reader in residence is available three days per week which has increased the interest in books and writing.

12.27 The learning centre should identify clearly the extent of need in relation to improving prisoners' core skills in communication and numeracy and put in place appropriate programmes to meet this need (paragraph 7.9).

Implemented.

12.28 The learning centre should implement measures to increase the number of prisoners attaining qualifications in core skills (paragraph 7.17).

Partly implemented. The increasing number of prisoners serving very short sentences and who invariably have addiction and mental health problems which have to be addressed as a priority, makes their access to qualifications difficult. By the time prisoners serving very short sentences are physically and emotionally able to participate in the Modules, they are preparing for release. A strategy for encouraging prisoners serving longer sentences is in place.

12.29 The prison should review the range of activities offered in residential areas with a view to identifying activities that engage the interest of prisoners more fully (paragraph 7.18).

Partly implemented. Some activities are available: access to the gym; the Young Enterprise Scotland projects; Destiny's Design and Skye Styles; YO's. R. US; Chaplains Youth Group; gym sessions; and fortnightly visits with Therapet. However, boredom in the evening and at weekends is still an issue for many prisoners, particularly those on remand. A new entertainments committee provides ideas for activities on a monthly basis in the gym at weekends.

12.30 The quality of provision in the learning centre should be evaluated (paragraph 7.20).

Implemented. Lauder College now conducts a self evaluation, and the prison conducts a primary assurance check.

12.31 The policy document for the Mother and Baby Unit should be updated (paragraph 8.7).

Partly implemented. The policy has been re-drafted. It has yet to be impact assessed.

12.32 Clearer guidance in terms of training for staff working in the Mother and Baby Unit should be provided (paragraph 8.9).

Partly implemented. Although there is reference in the draft policy to areas of need for staff training there is no evidence that programmes are in place to address this.

12.33 The establishment should examine ways of spreading the recreational time available to prisoners in the gym in a more equitable way (paragraph 8.21).

Partly implemented. PE times remain the same but the introduction of sports and games officers has allowed residential areas to access gym slots in the evening and at weekends, depending on staff availability.

12.34 The establishment needs better facilities for physical education (paragraph 8.24).

Partly implemented. At the time of inspection the changing facilities in the gymnasium were being upgraded.

12.35 SPS should clarify the position in relation to programme requirements not just for Cornton Vale but for all establishments (paragraph 8.39).

Implemented. 'Constructs' is due to start in April 2007. The establishment also delivers programmes for alcohol and drugs. There is also a connections programme about relationships and a programme delivered in conjunction with Aberlour and SPS which is a parenting programme linked to addictions.

12.36 Efforts should be made to ensure that the Black and Ethnic Minority Group continues to meet (paragraph 8.40).

Implemented. Minutes of each meeting are produced.

12.37 Race relations meetings should be minuted, a formal Race Relations Monitoring Group should be set up, and a review should take place of whether a Race Relation Officer should be allocated to each residential area (paragraph 8.41).

Partly implemented. Race Relations Officers have been appointed to each admission hall. All race issues are managed via the Black and Minority Ethnic Group.

12.38 Consideration should be given to providing a wider range of products for ethnic minority prisoners in the canteen, and ensuring that they are always in stock (paragraph 8.43).

Implemented.

12.39 The imbalance in levels of competence in core training should be addressed (paragraph 9.16).

Not implemented. Although all night shift staff are trained in first aid and the establishment meets the Health and Safety Executive target for trained staff across the prison there is still an imbalance between the number of staff who are Control and Restraint competent and the number of staff who are ACT2Care competent.

12.40 Untried prisoners should get the same service from the kitchen as convicted prisoners (paragraph 9.22).

Not implemented.

12.41 Prisoners in the ‘back cells’ in Younger and Skye should always be able to wash their hands before meals (paragraph 9.27).

Partly implemented. Protocols are in place and notices posted in the areas providing advice to prisoners and staff. However, prisoners have to be let out of their cells to wash their hands.

12.42 Managers should sample the food every day in both the kitchen and in the places where prisoners eat (paragraph 9.29).

Implemented.

12.43 More drying capacity in the laundry is required (paragraph 9.33).

Implemented.

12.44 Prisoners working in the laundry should be able to receive certification for skills acquired (paragraph 9.35).

Implemented.

4. NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Development of Central Block

4.1 Phase 1 of the development of an activities area was underway during the inspection. Staff training has taken place for laundry officers. A training kitchen is planned as part of the next phase but no funding has been agreed. Gym and work facilities have been improved.

Entertainments Committee

4.2 An Entertainments Committee has been created. The group held its first meeting in February 2007 and the early indications are very encouraging. The meetings are attended by staff and prisoners from different parts of the prison. Prisoners spoke very positively of the Committee and the opportunity to come up with ideas to keep prisoners occupied and entertained.

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