

## Overview

Previous inspections by the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) of juvenile custodial facilities have painted a consistent picture of staff shortages. In the latest inspection of Banksia Hill conducted in mid-2011, frequent shortages of staffing were noted and OICS warned of the critical importance of maintaining adequate staffing levels into and beyond the amalgamation period.<sup>1</sup> However, it is obvious that the Department has been unable to prevent a continued escalation in staff shortages.

A consequence of the continuing and escalating staff shortages were the excessive lockdowns of detainees, a factor which precipitated the riot.<sup>2</sup> These staff shortages were due to high levels of absenteeism due to unplanned leave, namely workers' compensation leave and personal leave. Even when compared to other large, 'high-risk' agencies, the amount of workers' compensation leave taken by the Department staff was high.

Excessive personal leave affects the Department generally, and not Banksia Hill alone. Nevertheless, the high frequency and length of personal leave, coupled with the extremely elevated workers' compensation rate placed a severe strain on the facility's operations. In the month prior to the riot, on average, out of approximately 80 uniformed staff rostered each day, 22 staff members were absent.<sup>3</sup> Even after individuals were brought in to cover the shifts through overtime, on average the facility was still down 15 uniformed staff every day.

There are a number of contributing factors to the alarmingly high levels of staff absenteeism. To begin with, it was clear that Banksia Hill was unable to assertively manage the problem, with chronic under-resourcing of Human Resources at the centre level and a lack of support and resources from Head Office.

The high absenteeism is also a reflection of an overall deterioration in morale and culture that has transpired over a number of years. Part of the problem has been management instability and a fractured relationship between management and staff, with three changes in Directors occurring in 2012 alone. Staff overall described management as being out of touch, incompetent and constantly changing.

The poor management of the amalgamation was another crucial contributor to the deterioration of staff culture and morale, and serves as a text-book example of how not to undertake an amalgamation, despite the best intentions of the individuals involved. A fundamental error was the discontinuation of the project co-ordinator role at the end of 2011, despite the large body of work still to be completed. Project management notes

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS), *Report of an Announced Inspection of Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre*, Report No. 76 (March 2012).

<sup>2</sup> See this Inquiry's *Emergency Management Review Paper* [5.14 – 5.16].

<sup>3</sup> This includes youth custodial officers, unit managers, and senior officers.

from May 2012 state that the abolishment of the position “proved largely non-advantageous”.

The distinct cultures of Rangeview and Banksia Hill were not accounted for in the amalgamation and the absence of shared policies, procedures and an underlying philosophy led to divisions among staff and confusion for detainees. The significant capital work delays and a number of serious building site related incidents further increased staff stress and fear. Many staff are still traumatised by the change and pessimistic about the future.

Contributing to the lack of cultural cohesion was the absence of an implemented performance management system to reinforce and sustain desired behaviours. This has led to high performing staff being provided little encouragement for their efforts and the minority of poor performing staff not being managed effectively.

Overall, while the amalgamation happened, true change has yet to occur. Until staff are united under a shared philosophy and culture (with associated performance management mechanisms in place), there will continue to be high levels of unplanned leave, low morale and an overall ‘identity crisis’ among staff. The move back from Hakea to Banksia Hill is therefore crucial in establishing a new, more positive culture among staff.