



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

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Behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill Detention Centre

The Inspector of Custodial Services, Neil Morgan, has welcomed changes the Department of Corrective Services (now part of the Department of Justice) has started to make to improve behaviour management practices at Banksia Hill Detention Centre. However, he cautioned that there is a long way to go. When releasing his new report on the topic today, he said:

Banksia Hill has been unstable for most of the last five years. 2016 and the first part of 2017 were especially volatile, with too many cases of serious damage, staff assaults, and self-harm by the young people.

It costs \$1,000 a day, or \$360,000 a year, to keep just one child in custody. For that level of investment, the community has a right to expect better levels of safety, stability and service delivery.

I have also concluded that the previous government's decision to make Banksia Hill the state's only detention centre has not worked, and that the government needs to examine alternative options.

The situation came to a head in early May, when two major incidents resulted in extensive damage and threats to staff. The Department used distraction devices ('flash bombs') and chemical agent to restore control. In earlier incidents, firearms loaded with beanbags had been aimed at young people, but not fired. Mr Morgan said:

Managing young people in detention will always be difficult. Almost all of them face complex layers of dysfunction, disengagement, and disadvantage. But the use of such weaponry to restore control was unprecedented. It was the most tangible indicator that Banksia Hill was failing the basics.

In 2014, the Department began a 'transformation project' at the Centre. The aim was to develop a 'trauma-informed' approach to managing young people, and a stronger focus on rehabilitation. Mr Morgan said:

The principle of trauma-informed care is right. The international evidence is that it will reduce recidivism and enhance public safety. But the project was badly implemented.

The Department did not explain what the new model meant, bring staff on board, or train them. Not surprisingly, morale and confidence declined, but distrust, confusion and inconsistency increased. This toxic mix contributed to volatility and risk.

The Department has already responded to the findings in this report. In May, it replaced the 'transformation project' with a different change program. The immediate aim is to make Banksia Hill stable, but the goal is still to work towards a more rehabilitative model.

Mr Morgan said that the biggest challenge for the Department is that Banksia Hill is too big and too complex to manage effectively. He said:

It is the most complex and challenging custodial facility in the State. It must hold males and females; children as young as 10 and young adults aged 18-plus; young people from every part of the state; and both sentenced and remand youth.

There is no 'silver bullet' to improving youth custodial services. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the 'one-stop shop' model has been a failure. Banksia Hill has been unstable for most of the past five years, despite its high cost.

I have therefore recommended that the government investigate opportunities for smaller facilities across the State. This would allow better separation and better targeted programs for youth in conflict with the law. With some modifications, Banksia Hill could then be used as either a female prison or a drug rehabilitation prison.

I acknowledge the challenges with the State's finances, but the current situation is not sustainable and some investment in custodial infrastructure is needed.

Neil Morgan
Inspector

For more details, please see the Inspector's Overview to the Report and Key Findings (copies attached).

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Monday 17 July 2017 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).