

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2019

Contact with family and friends while in custody

The Inspector of Custodial Services has released a report looking at the contact prisoners have with family and friends while they are in custody. The Inspector, Neil Morgan said:

It is very important for people in custody to maintain contact with family and friends. First, it improves their wellbeing and their families' peace of mind. This also assists prison management.

Secondly, contact with family and friends improves their chances of reintegrating into the community on release, finding accommodation and employment, and having financial, personal and practical support. This, in turn, improves community safety by reducing recidivism.

The Department of Justice facilitates contact through phone calls and visits. The report found that visitors are generally well-treated by staff but that prison overcrowding has made it increasingly difficult to meet demand for both visits and phone calls. Mr Morgan said:

As the population has risen, prisoners' access to phone calls has declined. At most prisons, there are fewer phones per person, and this has led to tension, frustration, and stand overs during peak periods.

Population pressures are also affecting access to visits. Where possible, the Department tries to place people in a prison close to home to make it easier for them to receive visits and maintain social ties. But it is increasingly difficult to do this. Visits sessions are also more difficult to schedule in the larger prisons because of the growing number and complexity of the prisoner population.

It will not be easy for the Department to address these issues in a tight fiscal environment and given that contracts for phone services remain in place. However, modern technologies present a multitude of options. They include wireless technology, 'Internet Visits' through Skype or other systems, and on-line visit booking systems.

The Department has responded positively, to our recommendations and has said it expects to implement some improvements in 2019. I look forward to this, as it is in the interests of prisoners, their families and friends, and the community as a whole.

Neil Morgan
Inspector

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on 14 January 2019 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

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