

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT NO 138 – 2021 INSPECTION OF ALBANY REGIONAL PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:00PM ON MONDAY 24 JANUARY 2022

The Inspector of Custodial Services' report on Albany Regional Prison released today has recognised several areas of sustained improvement for the prison. However, it also revealed many opportunities to improve services for prisoners.

Inspector Eamon Ryan said that it was encouraging that Albany had continued many of the improvements noted in the previous 2018 inspection.

'Albany should be recognised for sustained improvement in reception, orientation, education and training services over the past three years,' Mr Ryan said.

'But our report also highlights missed opportunities for improvement that prison management and the Department of Justice should consider,' Mr Ryan said.

Ageing, rundown and outdated infrastructure remained a key area of concern for the operation of the prison. A temporary easing of this pressure has been provided by reduced prisoner populations across the State, allowing the temporary closure of much of the prison's worn out Unit 1 accommodation, and reduced pressure on other deteriorating facilities.

Despite the opportunity created by the reduced pressures, apart from some minor work that is being undertaken, no plans had been approved for major works on the substandard accommodations, or other buildings at the prison.

'It presented the perfect opportunity for much-needed renewal, either by way of a complete rebuild or total refurbishment. Sadly, apart from some minor works, there were no approved and funded plans to make significant improvements to the conditions in Unit 1 or to any of the other facilities located within that building,' Mr Ryan said.

Also, despite the lower population we found that the proportion of men engaged in meaningful employment, education and programs had reduced, with 55 per cent of the population either unemployed or under-employed in unit work. Mr Ryan said this was a concern for both rehabilitation and the risks associated with the idleness of men sitting around with nothing to do.

Staff absences, or redeployments to cover absences, often impacted prisoners' access to services. This was often the case for recreation, music, art, chaplaincy and other support services.

'Organised recreation can keep otherwise unoccupied prisoners busy and help maintain good mental health when other activities are lacking. Despite dedicated recreation staff at Albany, they were often under-used or restricted by absences or redeployment,' he said.

'We also saw other activities for prisoners such as unit-based music and art, chaplaincy and spiritual support either unavailable or regularly cancelled. While not dismissing the challenges faced, it is important that these activities should be able to be facilitated without significant resources or effort.'

Mental health and welfare support for prisoners through the peer support team had been improving at Albany, however around the time of our inspection conflicts and a lack of training for prisoner team members had eroded those gains. As a fundamental aspect of suicide prevention, it is important prison management and the Department focus support and reinvigorate the service.

Mr Ryan said some of the challenges faced by the prison could be assisted by better engagement with the local community and regional groups from Albany. Historically, Albany had done this well. He encouraged greater flexibility and autonomy for prison management to increase engagement and find better supports, and for the Department to support those efforts.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 12:00pm on Monday 24 January 2022 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.