

Inspector's Overview

After a difficult and challenging period some stability is starting to return

Greenough Regional Prison (Greenough) has been through a difficult few years, but they appeared to be emerging from those challenges and we saw some stability return. A cohesive, experienced and capable leadership team had developed a solid business plan to guide future direction for the prison.

We saw the results of significant recovery work undertaken after the July 2018 riot. The new and impressive women's precinct in Unit 4 was completed and almost ready for occupation. There had been repairs and improvements to Unit 2 and Unit 3, including improved security facilities and internal barrier fences. The external perimeter barrier had been hardened and an imposing internal barrier now exists between Unit 4 and the main prison compound. Security systems, processes and equipment had also been upgraded and supplemented by staff training and emergency preparedness.

But we also heard complaints from some staff that there was still residual unease and unresolved trauma about working at Greenough. This presented as unhappiness with the level of engagement and support some felt they were getting from local management and head office. We also heard from many staff that there were significant impacts arising from staff absences, which resulted in redeployments, adaptive regimes and reduced services for prisoners. But the counter to those concerns was there were few vacancies in custodial staffing, relatively low workers' compensation cases and overtime was available to cover absences at Greenough. Staff redeployments appeared to be the burning issue.

The information we found suggested that Greenough still had, to some extent, a traumatised workforce. As we detail in this report there were well entrenched negative views and cynicism amongst some staff, some of whom may never be happy, but we felt there were genuine opportunities to improve these relationships and better capitalise on the progress that has been made to date. Responsibility for addressing these issues does not rest solely with the management team or the staffing group. It is a shared responsibility requiring cooperation and engagement between both the leadership and the staff. To that end, we were somewhat surprised with the Department's response to Recommendation 1 which related to offering proactive mental health supports to staff (and prisoners) who were present at Greenough during the 2018 riot. The Department acknowledged the ongoing psychological impacts, supported the recommendation as a "current practice/project", outlined the current arrangements in place, and closed the recommendation. This tells us that they felt that nothing additional, even by way of local initiatives, was warranted and/or that the problem was such that it did not require additional attention. The concerns shared with us by staff were real and they clearly did not feel they were being addressed by the supports currently in place. This is a missed opportunity.

The new women's precinct in Unit 4 is completed and ready for full occupancy – we understand that towards the end of April 2022 some women had been moved into the unit. Unit 4 needs to be fully operational as soon as possible for several reasons, none the least of which is to provide better services for women currently held at Greenough. It will also offer placement to other women from the region who may be held elsewhere. An additional and important benefit will be the return of Unit 5 as an incentive-based unit providing earned supervision and self-care as part of Greenough's current system of hierarchical management.

Our report contained 16 formal recommendations and the Department's response noted that only four remained open. Many of our recommendations were aimed at improving the current living conditions and services for prisoners, each of the four open recommendations fell within this category. The closure of recommendations based on work or projects currently under way across the Department should not result in a loss of attention to the core underlying issue that prompted our recommendation in the first place. A good example is Recommendation 6, which we made to address many complaints from prisoners about their access to phones and the tensions and frustrations this was causing within the units. The Department supported the recommendation as a current practice or project and referred to the work being done as part of a long-term custodial technology strategy and the development of a business case to replace the Prisoner Telephone System. There was no specific time frame mentioned and this appeared to be a long-term strategic project that is unlikely to address the immediate issues causing tension and frustration in Greenough right now.

We also highlighted similarities between the types of issues we identified, which supported many of our recommendations, and the assessment of preconditions prior to the 2018 riot that was undertaken by the Department's intelligence services and provided to the Shuard Review.

Throughout the report we have identified many opportunities for improvement to living conditions many of which could be addressed without any significant cost. We strongly encourage the Department and local management to take those opportunities and build on the positive work already being done at Greenough.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have only one Independent Prison Visitors at Greenough. She is an experienced community volunteer appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services in September 2021. She attends Greenough on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the men and women to raise issues and feedback information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of this volunteer work and thank her for the contribution she is making to our oversight of Greenough.

I also want to acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Greenough and from key personnel in the Department. The men and women who spoke with us to share their perspective on being held in Greenough also deserve special acknowledgment and thanks.

We were grateful to have a local community member and mental health specialist, Ms Patricia Councillor, join our inspection and provide a high-level cultural context.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Liz George for her hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

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