

Annual Report 2008

The Visiting Committee  
HMYOI Polmont

## Annual Report 2008

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# **THE VISITING COMMITTEE OF POLMONT YOUNG OFFENDERS INSTITUTION**

## **Annual Report**

1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008

## **Introduction**

Polmont Young Offenders Institution is in the process of undergoing a vast change. New accommodation units, Iona and Monro Halls, are now well established and the state of the art Activities Units have already added much in the way of improved facilities and increased opportunities. Over the course of the next two years, the transformation of the Polmont estate will continue with much needed improvements to the Visitor facilities, Gate House, Reception, Kitchen and other ancillary areas.

All of this is immensely welcome.

However, these positive developments must be set alongside the disappointing statistics that point to the prisoner population at Polmont now being at its highest ever. It is now the largest centre holding convicted and remanded young offenders in Scotland. In addition to these numbers, young offenders are also held at Greenock and at Friarton.

It is a continuing and growing concern of the Committee that these high numbers work against so many of the positive moves that have been made at Polmont over recent years. The effect on programmes and regimes can be extremely damaging. This is all the more concerning when the Governor is required to make budgetary efficiency savings year on year. The demand to do more with less is a trend that seems to continue unabated. The Committee, nevertheless, fully understands the external and internal constraints that the prison operates within and will continue to be supportive to management and staff in their efforts to provide a secure, safe, humane and constructive environment for prisoners.

The Committee is made up of twelve members. After a re-consideration of its working practices, it has moved to holding eight meetings per year, and has retained its rota method for dealing with regular visits and to deal with prisoner requests/applications. Committee members are volunteers, appointed by the Justice Minister and come with a range of backgrounds, experience and knowledge. The Committee dealt with 30 individual requests from prisoners over the course of the year and made 93 visits. In the course of these visits, a variety of matters concerning prison conditions and prisoner welfare arise, and these are reported to the Committee and discussed, where necessary with the prison management.

The Committee was pleased to welcome to its planning day in November, SPS Chief Executive Mike Ewart, along with other SPS senior officials. In the course of the year we also hosted a visit from the Independent Monitoring Board of Hydewood Bank, Northern Ireland, and from Cornton Vale -21 Visiting Committee. The Committee was also pleased to have Prof June Andrews, Stirling University address them, and to meet with Dr Andrew McLellan, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland. Members of the Committee have also taken the opportunity to increase their skills and knowledge through training and visits arranged by the National Association of Visiting Committees.

The Committee awaits with interest the findings of the Scottish Government's Prisons Commission and has been happy to provide a written submission to it from the particular perspective of those concerned for the young offender population. Members of the Committee were also invited to attend the public debates that took place.

The Committee is pleased to record that it continues to enjoy a positive working relationship with the Governor, senior management and staff and is grateful to them all for their co-operation.

#### **POINTS of NOTE from the REPORT**

- The many improvements, completed and underway in the physical estate
- The continued increase in prisoners, both convicted and untried
- The increase in staff sickness absence
- The continued need for investment in support for families, including the role of the FCDO
- The continuing challenge of providing and encouraging healthier diets
- The lack of purposeful activity for many prisoners
- The welcome introduction of the Violence Prevention Programme
- The welcome and increased focus on employability

Alastair MacKinnon  
**Chairman**

## **1.STAFFING**

1.1 The Committee continues to have great confidence in the skills, motivation and commitment of the vast majority of the staff in Polmont. Over the last year, the increasing numbers of prisoners, especially those remanded, along with the level of disruption caused by the redevelopment of the prison, have added to the normal working pressures of the prison environment. The Committee believes that positive staff attitudes and effective management have operated well to minimise the negative effects of these changes.

1.2 The number of staff at the time of writing is 358. This excludes those working in the Institution but employed by external agencies. Staffing levels are set by the Scottish Prison Service centrally. Although the Committee is aware that the staff complement matches the SPS requirement, there are very many occasions in which the Committee questions the adequacy of staffing levels, most particularly in the residential units. Although the Committee accepts that staffing is the most costly item in the prison's budget, it remains concerned that what is often perceived to be minimal staffing levels impacts negatively on both prisoner and staff welfare.

1.3 It is of concern to the Committee that the number of staff sickness absence days has increased over the course of the year. This can have a deleterious effect on the operations of the prison regimes and programmes and adds to the pressure on other staff. This position is the reverse of a welcome trend that had been taking place.

1.4 The Committee was sorry to see Mr Bill Millar leave as Governor and pleased to welcome Mr Derek McGill as the new Governor in June 2007, and Mrs Chrissie McGeever as Deputy Governor later in the year, on the retirement of Mr Bill Middleton.

## **2.ESTATES**

2.1 The replacement of outdated buildings with new premises fit for purpose has continued with the next phase of Polmont's redevelopment. Much of this change has gone unnoticed by visitors but the replacement of the kitchen, visits and reception areas coupled with the demolition of vacated buildings has required a redesign of the approach to Polmont.

2.2 Apart from the considerable distances to be covered by the staff and young offenders in accessing most facilities there has been no real inconvenience and the programme has been well planned.

2.3 While the upgrading and considerable investment in property at Polmont is improving facilities for prisoners, it is unfortunate that increasing prisoner numbers has led to doubling up in cells - in many cases in accommodation designed for single occupancy. This can lead to tension between occupants and additional supervision is often required by staff.

2.4 General maintenance is still required and work is ongoing to improve ventilation in Iona Hall and the Activities building. It is pleasing to note that additional funding was made available for this work which was regarded as a deficiency in the original design. Unfortunately funding has had to come from within the approved budget to rectify damage in some cells and communal areas occupied by young remands in part of Iona Hall. This is an ongoing problem which mainly relates to walls where the traditional paint decoration has been replaced by stainless steel.

## **3.GOOD ORDER AND CARE**

### **3.1 Reception**

The increase in the prison population at Polmont has had a significant impact on the Reception area. This is an extremely busy area and the staff and the YO passmen invariably go about their

duties in a positive and enthusiastic way. It is felt by many of the passmen to be the best place to work in the Institution; they work as a team and organise a wide range of jobs that in turn provide them with a great deal of responsibility and worthwhile skills that they will be able to use on release.

With every arrival and departure of a YO associated paperwork has to be completed and clothes and personal possessions have to be issued or tagged and stored. It normally takes about 45 minutes for arrivals to pass through Reception but recently it has been known for all 26 cubicles to be occupied with more YOs being held in the Reliance vans outside.

The Reception area in the new build will be a much better environment and this should be in place by the end of 2009.

It is of concern to the Committee that some prisoners claim to be in transit to and from the court to Polmont for long periods of time, especially if their court appearance is at some of the more distant locations. In addition, and this may be related, The Committee continues to be concerned at the number of prisoner arrivals to the Institution from court late in the evening. This can be disruptive to the prison and does not allow an adequate initial induction. At times, the Committee has had concern that young offenders do not always receive an adequate meal in the evening if they arrive after the residential meals have been served.

### **3.2 Healthcare**

The Health Care team aim to provide a high standard of health care and deliver a range of health care opportunities for Young Offenders equal to those provided in the primary care settings.

They aim to encourage Young Offenders to improve their health by promoting a healthier lifestyle. There is 24 hour cover provided by Medacs. The staffing level comprises of Registered Nurses, Healthcare Assistants, and contracted specialists. Most consultations and treatments are carried out in the halls. Y O's requiring secondary care are admitted to hospital for this.

YOs are able to self refer for all health-care services. If they refer for triage, they will be seen on the same day and if they refer for an external specialist, they will be given an appointment. There are a variety of Nurse led clinics available to the young men suffering from chronic conditions such as, Diabetes, Asthma, and Epilepsy. Specialised clinics include Addictions, Family planning , Well Man Clinic, HIV and Hep C Counselling, Mental Health and Sexual Health.

Other specialised services that can be accessed include the Dentist, Oral Health Educator, Optician, Podiatrist and Speech- therapist.. Three local GPs visit the prison on a Monday to Saturday basis, working a 3 week rota. The prison is also served by a visiting Psychiatrist, and by Psychologists.

The Health Centre is staffed from 06.30 until 9.30pm. Nightshift and weekends are covered by the Medacs on call system. There is an induction course for new prisoners informing them of the services available. YOs on sentences under 3 months are not included in this course.

This is a busy unit in the prison, and the work done by the health care staff is holistic, looking after the physical and mental welfare of the YOs.

### **3.3 Catering**

There is no doubt that the Catering Department has worked hard to improve the diet of YOs and has undoubtedly made improvements in quality over the last year. Chips are now served on fewer occasions (two to four times a week) and more fruit is provided (although not always fresh fruit). But the nutritional content still falls short of that required for secondary school pupils. Another barrier to healthier eating has been the preferences of YOs themselves but it is to be hoped that the food focus groups will have an educative function as well as simply providing feedback to the kitchen. More could be done to encourage healthier eating, perhaps with the help of outside experts. Portion size continues to be an issue for many YOs who comment that they do not get enough to eat, despite the increased portions. But this may in part be due to a reluctance to eat all of the items on offer to them.

However, further improvements in quality and quantity are difficult given the small size of the budget for meals. Despite the very welcome increase to £2 just over a year ago, the daily budget

for food and drink is still significantly less than the average spend of £2.34 in Scottish hospitals in 2005-2006 (Audit Scotland)

The biggest issue for the kitchen over the last year has undoubtedly been the move to a temporary kitchen to allow the demolition of the existing kitchen and the building of a new facility. The existing kitchen was originally designed to cater for 450 YO's and is now routinely serving closer to 700. Apart from capacity problems, much of the equipment is antiquated and unreliable and breakdowns mean that convenience food has to be used more often than is desirable. The move to the temporary kitchen took place in the middle of March. The temporary kitchen will be in operation for a minimum of 19 months and will bring its own problems in terms of capacity but will be better equipped than the old facility.

Another issue which deserves comment is the lack of opportunity for YO's working in the kitchen to gain qualifications. While it is possible to gain a food hygiene qualification, some of the YO's are keen to undertake a catering qualification and this would help them to gain work on liberation and may reduce the risk of re-offending. The absence of training of this sort is regrettable. However, it is the intention that the new kitchen will have teaching facilities and additional staff will be trained to act as SVQ assessors.

The range of food and drink which the YO's can purchase for additional snacks is very focused on sweets and fizzy drinks – "like a school tuck shop" one YO complained. Given the high content of additives in these items and their impact on behaviour, concentration, weight and dental health, we would like to see the range of snacks modified to provide more healthy options, especially fruit.

## **4. RESIDENTIAL ACCOMODATION**

### **4.1 Monro Hall**

This four storey residential unit was opened in 2007 and continues to be a very welcome change from the previous outdated accommodation. The Hall is very large and each floor is divided in two by grille gates with a central desk /hub that serves both sides of that floor.

**4.1.1 Level 1 Monro** holds convicted short-term prisoners. This level has 20 double and 52 single bedded cells. The standard of cells, in terms of decoration and cleanliness varies greatly, though mostly it is of a good standard. Staff interact well with the young men in a busy and sometimes challenging environment, where the turn over is relatively high. As with other levels, there is a constant challenge to get prisoners out of cells and engaged in activities – work and education. The recent installation of bunk beds in single cells is an unfortunate sign of the pressure on accommodation even in this most recent Hall.

**4.1.2 Level 2 Monro** holds prisoners under 18 years old and includes remand and convicted prisoners. This level has 20 double and 44 single cells and 4 other cells for specific circumstances. At times this mix of prisoners can lead to an unsettled environment and the population is a constantly challenging one to manage. It normally holds around 90 prisoners. Bunk beds are sited in some of the single rooms, an unfortunate development in this new hall. Facilities are generally good despite the numbers, but access can be an issue with numbers being high. During the year, legislation came into force that made the purchase of tobacco by under 18's illegal. This was an issue that was well handled in the hall.

Conditions of the cells vary greatly dependent on the occupants' interest in keeping the cell clean and tidy. In some cases where there is little attention to this, and especially in 'doubled up' cells, the atmosphere can be fetid and unpleasant.

The Committee remains very concerned at the use of imprisonment for children under 16, an issue that has arisen in this hall on several occasions throughout the year. The care and attention of management and staff cannot compensate for the damage that being held in prison at such an age must cause.

**4.1.3 Level 3 Monro.** Earlier in 2008, the Monro Hall completed its first full year of operation. Level 3 took over much of the valuable role previously undertaken by Nevis Hall in accommodating and managing YO's with addiction problems. It is encouraging to note that a substantial number of the experienced residential staff transferred across with the YO's, but the overall number accommodated in the new premises is greater.

Level 3 is considered by many YO's to be a popular and well maintained hall with about a third at any one time serving four or more years. Although not described now specifically as an 'addictions unit', there is a policy that it should be drug free. This has not always been easy to maintain especially at times of pressure for places within the establishment. The consequence is that Level 3 receives some short termers, in emergency, who are not drug free, which can be disruptive. At any one time there are also two or three YO's on Methadone programmes seeming rather to counter the policy. On occasions even the cell allocated for drug testing has been used for accommodation, but there has been no doubling up in single cells.

A good proportion, up to a half, of the YO's go out to work regularly within the establishment. A pilot is planned to commence with an outside employer for 2 young offenders to be trained on external placement on day release from Polmont. If they successfully complete their training and assessment they will be guaranteed work on liberation. If the pilot is successful it is hoped that the scheme may be expanded with further opportunities made available to other young offenders. Regrettably there is not the space available to undertake small group work along the lines undertaken previously within the old Nevis Hall. All the programmed addiction work is undertaken by Phoenix, not really involving the residential staff at all.

**4.1.4 Level 4 Monro** is the protection prisoners level, and houses a variety of prisoners, including but not only sex offenders who require to be kept separate from the wider prison population. This level has 20 double and 48 single cells and 3 other cells for specific circumstances. Sometimes this level operates below its capacity because of the unwillingness of some prisoners to be located in this area due to the negative perceptions that are attached to it by the mainstream prisoner population. Work opportunities have increased over the course of the year, and facilities, access to programmes /activities, and links to external agencies are generally good. Staff continue to have a high level of input with and management of this group of prisoners, and on the whole this level operates very well.

## **4.2 Iona Hall**

This three storey hall, like Monro Hall, has two sections on each floor separated by grille gates with a central desk /hub that serves both sides of the Hall.

**4.2.1 Level 1 Iona** holds remand prisoners. It has 16 double, 48 single and 5 other cells. High numbers have become a daily occurrence on this level and double occupation in cells designed for one is not unusual. It can be difficult for staff when a large proportion of the remands have little to do during the day so stay in their beds and effectively turn day into night. The level of unruly behaviour and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults on this level is high compared to the rest of the prison. Staff are to be commended for their management of this constantly changing and somewhat unpredictable group of prisoners.

Lack of purposeful activity for this group is a major concern. Although some remand prisoners do take advantage of the sports hall, this is likely to be about 20 out of a complement of perhaps 120. An issue for remands, whether in Level 1 or 2, is the length of time that some are in Polmont before conviction or release.

The problem of lack of access to phones for young remands due in court on a Monday still seems not to have been resolved. The issue being telephone access accounts being closed on the previous Friday which means they can make no calls to family or others over the weekend. Access to 'canteen' facilities has also caused some problems. For remands arriving on Friday

afternoon or later it can be Tuesday before they have the opportunity to order items from the canteen.

**4.2.2 Level 2 Iona** has a mixture of convicted short-term prisoners and remand prisoners. It has 16 double and 56 single cells. Level 2 is very busy, for example in November 2007 143 prisoners were received and processed and a 100 remands were admitted onto level 2.

For a while due to the opening of a young offender hall in HMP Greenock the number located in all of Iona fell to between 260 -290. The numbers have since increased and due to Level 2 having some bunk beds the maximum has been 322.

Damage to the fabric of this hall is a problem and cells routinely have to be repainted; remand prisoners feel little attachment to their cell since after court appearances they will likely return to a different cell. As an admission hall, many of the prisoners will also move to other halls. The standard of 'furnishing' in the rooms, whilst adequate, tends to be unsuitable in terms of robustness and the high turnover of prisoner use.

The high numbers in this hall, as with level 1, can pose difficulties in the arrangements for daily recreation and showers. This has, on occasion, been raised as an issue with the Visiting Committee by prisoners.

**4.2.3 Level 3 Iona** is for long stay (over 4 years) prisoners aged 18 or older. The maximum capacity is for 88 YO's in 16 double rooms and 56 single rooms and the Hall has been fully occupied most of the year. As at 1 April 2008, there were 88 YO's in Iona 3, the same number as a year earlier although numbers have occasionally been as low as 75. At any point in the year, around half of the YO's had earned enhanced privilege status with only around 20% on the basic level. The Hall is tidy and well kept. It can get very warm in sunny weather. Most of the YO's were generally happy with conditions although as long term prisoners they would welcome more visits. A recurrent complaint, as in other parts of the institution, is the quality of the food and the small portions. The committee observed that significant numbers of YO's did not go to work or activities either because of lack of availability or because they refused to. The sanctions for refusal are not in our view effective. Relations with staff are good and officers are to be commended for their commitment. A concern often voiced amongst officers is the lack of time to interact with YO's because of staff/ prisoner ratios and the time needed to undertake duties associated with the Integrated Case Management process.

### **4.3 Dunedin**

The Dunedin segregation unit is a vast improvement on the previous facility. It has 15 cells altogether. The cells are much brighter, have integrated sanitation, hand-basin, bed and fixed table and seat. The unit has exercise areas which are larger and totally enclosed. There is not a great deal of enthusiasm from many of the Dunedin population to use this.

The Unit office also serves as an orderly room when required. There are secure visits/interview areas in the unit, a servery, a fitness room and a medical room.

It can be difficult at times for the Visiting Committee to speak to prisoners in this area, as normally three members of staff should be present when a cell is opened. This can be overcome, if necessary by seeing the young offender in a secure visits room. Staff are invariably accommodating and helpful, and members of the Committee have been impressed, and witnessed at first hand the professional way in which difficult and violent situations are dealt with.

The unit is very rarely full, although the Committee was concerned that it has been used on occasion to house new prisoners arriving at Polmont overnight when there has been no other option.

The staff team in this unit does a very good job of trying to re-habilitate and where appropriate re-integrate some of the most difficult prisoners. The Committee commend the staff for their efforts to establish and maintain a humane and positive regime in demanding circumstances. Efforts to improve the facilities and incentives, within the constraints of the operating regime are continually being explored. The unit has been used to house a very few prisoners long term where efforts to

re-integrate them have failed. For those prisoners, consideration should be given to providing facilities in a secure environment for intensive therapeutic work and education.

## **5.ACTIVITIES and OPPORTUNITIES**

### **5.1 Activities / Work.**

It is pleasing to note that proposals to introduce a facility to assist prisoners with independent living skills and to enhance their personal and social development have now come into operation. Within the Independent Living Unit, links have been formed with a number of outside agencies such as health and emergency services who help Young Offenders relate to the many challenges to be found in everyday life following liberation. Matters such as cooking, home safety, managing finance and personal health feature in the programme.

Activities in general classroom work includes Young Offenders becoming involved in Young Enterprise Scotland business planning which gained publicity in a national newspaper and an invitation to a workshop presentation to the Tom Hunter Foundation. Within Polmont business groups develop a business plan and make a presentation to the Governor for modest start up funding for projects such as providing stationery, toys and decorative items.

The Personal and Social Development Unit is doing good work in providing facilities for the integration into mainstream activities for those who may feel vulnerable, have communication or mental health problems. Referral is by various means such as Integrated Case Management outcomes, officer referral etc and the programme helps participants learn the basics of communication, and understanding and respecting other people's views

The various vocational training workshops give youngsters the chance to receive training and gain qualifications in activities that may give them the opportunity of work on liberation. Subjects such as painting and decorating, fork lift truck operation, hairdressing, plumbing etc are all well supported.

It is of concern to the Visiting Committee that the number of places for work and training are restricted by the number of workshops on site. With the population at Polmont likely to rise to over 800 it is likely that there will be a considerable increase in the number of Young Offenders spending more time in their cells if there is not also an increase in training / education facilities.

### **5.2 Links Centre**

The Links Centre is a key function in Polmont and much of what is planned for a prisoner is dependent on the services provided in this unit. It is located in one of the new Activity Units and is a bright welcoming space. Induction procedures apply to all prisoners and for the convicted they vary according to length of sentence and the nature of the sentence. Polmont deals with around 70 new admissions every week, so the demand is high. The induction programme for remands which is provided three days a week, should be attended by all first time remandees. Attendance varies and an attempt is now being made to ensure that those choosing not to take part, confirm their decision in writing.

The Links Centre is the focal point for activities associated with induction, pre-release, and family contact work. All prisoners at Polmont are assessed and their needs identified through 'alerting' tools. The needs of first time prisoners and their families are taken seriously at Polmont and efforts to break down the fear and mystique that families may have are to be commended. Family awareness visits are valuable and can assist both the prisoner and family in coming to terms with the prisoner's changed circumstances. The Committee very much hopes that these will continue to be seen as good practice and an essential service.

Links Centre staff have an established an extensive network of partner organisations, local authority, housing and support agencies across Scotland. This is essential in assisting prisoners

moving on when they leave Polmont and great efforts are made by the Links Centre staff to better engage employers in the process of increasing employment options for young offenders. The Construction Skills Certificate Scheme and Work Net are welcome examples of the commitment of the Centre to increasing employability for prisoners on release.

### **5.3 Sports Centre**

The Sports Centre provides more than the expected sporting activities. The Sports Centre supporting the community continues to be established through contacts with a primary school in Whitburn and a Secondary school in Bo'ness. The sports element of the Duke of Edinburgh Award is well attended. A smoking cessation group had opportunities for extra PT sessions to help sustain their new training regime and change of lifestyle. A number of children with special needs were entertained with a fun day in the sports centre. This is the fourth time that these children from Larbert have used the facilities. Eight young YOs planned and designed all of the activities and were a credit to themselves. The Edinburgh Leisure Group completed a 12 week course and all of the YOs who attended achieved their level 1 coaching award 'Coaching in the Community'. Five YOs completed a walk to the summit of Ben Lomond raising in excess of £500 in sponsorship which is going towards building a school in Tanzania. On a lighter note the centre has also been the venue for bingo, quiz and sumo wrestling as well as playing host to various concerts.

Throughout the year it has been gratifying to note that attendance at the sports centre has increased nearly every month. The circuit and weights clubs are especially popular. Astro turf sessions have been very well attended and a mini Champions League was played with excellent conduct and attitude. Another Champions League is now underway. Efforts are still ongoing to attract the less motivated prisoners to the Sports Centre. The numbers attending are rising but there is still a long way to go.

### **5.4 Youthwork**

**5.4.1 The Outlet youth centre** has provided a valuable service to on average 350 young offenders each month. The centre operated with two professional youth work staff, employed and managed by YouthLink Scotland, and with prison officers from Monro 2.

Youthwork activities were provided through both issue-based programmes and through drop-in style sessions of a more informal nature. In the issue based work, a wide range of topics were addressed in innovative and educational ways, including bullying, mental-health and wellbeing, sectarianism, sexual health, social and life skills, active citizenship, knife culture and racial awareness. In November 07, the first group of young men who completed the anti-sectarian course were presented with certificates from the Community Safety Minister, Fergus Ewing MSP. The centre was also a key contributor to the anti-violence programme that was developed.

The centre has long had a reputation for developing and performing drama pieces and in July 07 they produced and performed a humorous and lively Dick Whittington. Cast, crew and audience enjoyed an entertaining event, and family members of some of the cast were present.

The centre continued to provide input to Induction as an opportunity for new prisoners to find out about programmes and the services on offer. Peer literacy initiatives and peer support has been a valuable service provided through the youth work centre in liaison with the Learning Centre. The contract for this externally provided Youth Work service has now ended and has not been renewed. The Committee waits with interest to see how this activity is delivered over the coming year.

#### **5.4.2 Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.**

The previous concern of the Visiting Committee that the operation of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme within Polmont would cease with the removal of most low supervision young offenders to Friarton has been realised. At the moment, young offenders in Polmont are not

presented as candidates for the Bronze Award as in previous years. Currently, they are only participating in the Physical Recreation section - which is only one section of the five required - to obtain the Bronze award. The young offender attends extra P.E. with a commitment of at least one hour per week over a three month period. He is then presented with a certificate to show he has completed this unit. There is no longer a nominated SPS officer to deal with requests to participate, liaise with other agencies or devote time specifically to the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

### **5.5 Interventions**

Over the course of the year the Interventions team has successfully delivered a range of prisoner programmes including Constructs (formerly Cognitive Skills), Rolling STOP, Drug and Alcohol Awareness and, for the first time, a Violence Prevention Programme. The VPP has been a particularly important piece of collaborative work involving colleagues from Psychology, Social Work and the Links Centre, amongst others. However, the resource requirements of this intensive programme have impacted on other courses, in particular Anger Management and Positive Parenting which are not currently available. Also of concern is the lack of suitable interventions for prisoners under the age of 18, although this situation is currently under review.

Over the course of 2007-08, the Visiting Committee has been impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the staff involved in programmes as they adjust to, and implement, a number of important new initiatives. It is therefore pleasing to see this work recognised in the 2007 report on Polmont by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons.

### **5.6 Social Work Department**

Social Work plays a key role in the rehabilitation and resettlement of young people at Polmont. The Social Work team currently has seven social workers, one of whom is the Team Leader. The team also supports a social work student. The bulk of work undertaken is statutory work, involving all long term prisoners – those serving sentences of at least four years, Schedule 1 offenders, those who, when released, will be subject to a Supervision Order, and any children – those under the age of 16. In 2007-08 the team dealt with 549 case reports.

The move to the Activity 2 building, which brought Social Work together with colleagues in psychology, programmes and learning, continues to bring benefits in the form of enhanced working relationships and communication. More purposeful contact with residential staff through programme delivery and casework has also helped to build relations.

Over the year the Social Work team has been closely involved with the development of Integrated Case Management at Polmont. This multi-disciplinary approach to sentence management has allowed more effective, joined-up action planning with better links to community based social work. Recently this has also involved families taking part in case conferences.

### **5.7 Learning Centre**

The Learning Centre service continues to be contracted out to Motherwell College which is also the provider to a number of other SPS establishments. The range of classes it provides is now split between two buildings, Activities 1 and 2. Not only does this divide up the teaching team, but also exacerbates the already complicated logistics of getting YOs to and from the classes. The Visiting Committee was helped at its 'awayday' in a presentation by the Learning Centre's manager, to appreciate the breadth of what it is expected to provide.

The teaching staff and their managers are committed to delivering a quality service and appreciate the reasonably spacious classrooms they have at their disposal. Within a class there is nothing obvious that would suggest being in a penal establishment. The classes are all small and individually focussed because of the wide ranging abilities and interests of the YOs who choose to attend. The staff face two overarching problems: the first is not knowing who will turn up for a class which means a lack of continuity and, secondly, the unusual length of each class, up to three and a half hours, which affects the concentration of both the students and the teaching

staff. This has been recognised and the possibility of splitting morning and afternoon sessions into two is under consideration.

The relationship between the students and the teaching staff appears to be a healthy one, but it is clear that the motivation for taking part in the formal classes varies considerably e.g. from wanting to complete *Highers* to simply having a change from the cell. These differences make exceptional demands on the teaching staff who have to cope with such diverse expectations.

Clearly a very high proportion of the YOs within the Institution could benefit considerably from attending classes in the Learning Centre. But many YOs do not have the necessary interest, often due to past experience, or the enthusiasm, especially if on a short sentence, to get up and go despite the encouragement from hall staff. The provision of the Learning Centre is an important, yet costly, component of the overall service within the Institution. A good and varied service is delivered for the YOs who participate, but additional participation might be encouraged by allocating some of the teaching staff to undertake home learning and related activities in the halls.

### **5.8 Visits**

Security remains the main priority in the Visits area. The vigilance of the staff on duty and the scanning security equipment work towards providing as relaxed an atmosphere as possible for those visiting. As Visits play a vital part in the week of the YOs, every effort is made to reduce the stresses and strains of visiting. The information booklet provides full information about the visits system so that visitors can make best use of their visit and be aware of the arrival and departure times. The café run by the WRVS in the Visits area is well used and the families are appreciative of this facility.

The toilets in the Visits waiting area are now cleaned by contract cleaners which has helped to reduce the volume of unwanted substances and objects entering the prison. The scanner is a vital piece of equipment, although the Visits room still remains an entry point for drugs. The presence of the SPS drug detection dogs is very often an effective deterrent.

### **5.9 Religion**

The support, advice, pastoral care and family contact that the chaplaincy team provide at Polmont is regarded by many prisoners as invaluable, especially at times of difficulty and crisis. The multi-faith team aims to provide a service to prisoners that is relevant to their needs and context. This has, at times, proved very challenging in the last year. The location of the chaplaincy within the Activity Unit proved less accessible and less suitable for the needs of the chaplaincy. Movement of prisoners to religious services has long been a recurring problem and this has been somewhat remedied by services being held in Halls and on week days. A positive point however is the closer relationship with other 'departments' that the new location affords.

The Chaplains are active in supporting many areas of the prison's activities including involvement in the ICC, case conferences and in various ad-hoc working groups. Chaplains are involved with the National Prisoners Week events and with events around Mental Health week. Support for prisoners at the major Christian festivals is of course welcomed by staff and YOs alike. The involvement of external groups such as the Iona Community, the Jacob Project and local church groups augments the work of the chaplaincy as indeed does the placement of students from religious training institutions.

The Muslim Imam has had a consistently small and interested group of young men requiring his services and his interventions to provide opportunities to celebrate Islamic festivals, such as Eid, have been a welcome innovation.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2008

Alastair MacKinnon	Chairman
Shirley Wherrett	Vice Chairman
Helen Finlayson	Clerk
Ian Adam O.B.E, Q.F.S.M.	
Jan Bruntisfield J.P.	(from Jan 2008)
Sheena Duncan	(until Nov 2007)
Joan Fraser	
James Gibson	(until Feb 2008)
Robert Mitchell J.P.	
Laurie Naumann	
Marion Pagani O.B.E.	
Don Williamson	
Morag Wilson	

### Applications to the Visiting Committee by Young Offenders

1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008

Category of Application	2007-8	2006-7	2005-6
Food	1	3	-
Visits	3	3	5
Work	1	-	1
Conditions	4	9	9
Other	21	9	15
No details		-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30</b>

### **Visits**

The Committee made 93 visits over the course of the year to the various functions and areas of the Institution.