Justice Committee

Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2013-14

Written submission from Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

1. Thank you for the Committee’s invitation to attend the evidence session on the financing of the findings of the Commission on Women Offenders and to provide a written submission prior to this session. This letter constitutes my written submission and is primarily based on my inspections of HMP&YOI Cornton Vale.

2. The Committee will be aware that since my appointment as Chief Inspector of Prisons I have inspected Cornton Vale three times:

- Full inspection 21 September to 29 September 2009.
- 1st Follow Up Inspection 1 to 4 February 2011.
- 2nd Follow Up Inspection (Unannounced) 30 January to 2 February 2012.

All these inspection reports can be found on the Inspectorate’s website: www.scotland.gov.uk/hmip For brevity and ease of understanding I suggest that Committee members need only look at the introductory ‘Preamble’ or ‘Overview’ sections of each report. In addition I and my staff have made regular visits to see female prisoners at HMP Greenock and HMP Edinburgh.

3. In general I have set out a picture at Cornton Vale where the prison has lacked the necessary strategic and local leadership to provide acceptable conditions for prisoners or treatment of prisoners. My first recommendation, “…that female prisoners should have a focus at SPS Board level, with a view to setting the agenda for the future and for ensuring such an agenda is implemented quickly and with purpose” was largely ignored, hence why, until 114 prisoners were moved to Ratho Hall at HMP Edinburgh 18 months later, little, if anything, improved at Cornton Vale. Importantly, this recommendation was also about improving the funding priority of Cornton Vale; the Committee may remember that I made this point when I last appeared before them. Until the allocation of additional capital funding of £20M targeted towards the needs of the female prison population, the prison has not received sufficient funding priority. Now the question is, how is this money to be spent?

4. As I said in my first report, “Cornton Vale is in a state of crisis…”. Given that little, if anything, had changed by the time I returned for the first follow up inspection over one year later, I was grateful that Dame Elish Angiolini was subsequently asked to lead the Commission on Women Offenders.

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1 See Follow Up Report 1 – 4 February 2011, paragraph 2.18: “Overall, I conclude that the SPS Board must now put Cornton Vale at the very top of the priority list to address the prison’s shortcomings, most obviously a poor regime and culture….. It is also my view that Cornton Vale be rebuilt as soon as is practicably possible in order to improve the very poor conditions.”
5. The evidence that I gave the Commission consisted of the two reports that I had written at that stage, as well as appearing to give oral evidence on two occasions. I continue to support the Commission’s report and particularly the recommendations related to Cornton Vale which largely complemented the recommendations that I had made. In particular, I support the recommendation that a new prison be built. Cornton Vale is not fit for purpose.

6. Since the publication of my second report two significant events have occurred:

- Firstly, 114 women prisoners were transferred to Ratho Hall in Edinburgh prison. This significantly reduced the prison population in Cornton Vale which improved the conditions there as I reported in my second follow up report earlier this year. Nevertheless, there remain many complex and challenging issues which need attention at Board and Governor level. For example, I am still concerned about family access, difficult prisoner mental health issues and sustained segregation of a small number of prisoners for too long.

- The second has been the arrival of the new Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, Colin McConnell. He has begun to provide the impetus and leadership that has been so desperately needed. He has told me that he will personally provide the female prisoner focus I have been calling for at Board level and I will be making my future judgements based on his commitment. Already I can see hope of improvement; for example there is evidence of SPS support for a family Prisoner Visitor Centre at the prison. This is something I have been calling for since 2009. His appointment of Mrs Kate Donegan as the new Governor suggests a very real attempt to sort out a number of leadership and management issues and give clear guidance for the future. In my opinion there appears to be a much more positive attitude at SPS Headquarters. I am hopeful this will bring about the transformational change required to deliver the improvements that and Dame Elish Angiolini and I have been recommending.

7. Although there are very real signs of improvement, I will continue to keep a close eye on developments. In particular I want to ensure that the treatment of prisoners and the conditions in which they live really do improve during this period of transition.

8. The important issue from my point-of-view is how the new capital funding will be spent. It is my judgement that bold decisions must be made; ‘tinkering’ and improving the fabric of the current prison is not a long-term option. There is an opportunity now to design a new prison specifically for women, including young offenders. This will require clear vision and incorporation of international ‘best practice’. Failure to deliver this will mean that women prisoners will continue to endure the conditions at Cornton Vale for longer than necessary. I accept that a long term solution will include women being held at Edinburgh and the new HMP Grampian.

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2 The second follow up report (30 January – 2 February 2012) was not published until after the publication of the Commission’s report.
9. I have not formally inspected HMP Edinburgh or HMP Greenock where women are also held. My assessment, based on regular Inspectorate visits, is that women in both prisons are held in acceptable conditions and treated to the standards that I would expect. However, I would like to see improved access to activities at these prisons for women; I will continue to monitor the situation at both these prisons.

10. Finally I quote from my recently-published Annual Report: “The conditions at Compton Vale were a cause for shame; never again must such a situation exist.”

Brigadier Hugh Monro CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland
11 October 2012