

Brigadier Hugh Monro CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland,
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Dear Brigadier Monro

HMYOI Polmont HMIPS Inspection Report, January 2013: feedback on the Inspection Report from Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority

Thank you for sending me a copy of the Inspection Report, dated January 2013. As you would expect, the feedback from the CJA is primarily focused on throughcare and with prison based rehabilitative programmes intended to prepare young people to “enter society in a positive way and move away from the risks of offending”.

Context to the CJA response

Over the last 2 years a number of partner organisations have been working together, sponsored by Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority, to agree how re-integration support for young people from Lothian and Borders leaving HMYOI Polmont can be enhanced. Partners include: Scottish Prison Service, the 5 local councils, Scottish Courts Service, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Police, Health, Department for Work and Pensions, Skills Development Scotland, and several third sector partners: Sacro, Access to Industry, Barnardos, Phoenix Futures, the Rock Trust, and Caledonia Youth.

This work has resulted in the development of a Reintegration Protocol which sets out what various organisations will do to support a young person returning to the community following a period of custody.

This protocol recognises the process that will be in place for young people aged 16/17 years of age under the Whole System Approach and therefore sets out the process for supporting the re-integration needs of 18 to under 21 year olds leaving HMYOI Polmont.

The overarching aim of the Reintegration Protocol is for young offenders leaving HMYOI Polmont to have the opportunity of a planned release arrangement, linked with appropriate resources, with the purpose of reducing the incidence of re-offending by young people, following their release. A particular focus will be to increase and improve engagement with voluntary throughcare.

A key aspect of the Protocol is a case management approach involving a Lead Officer who, working with prison staff including the young person's Personal Officer and other agencies, will engage with a young person very soon after coming to Polmont to identify what re-integration support they will need following release. They will link with community based services and prior to release will review support needs with the young person. If the young person agrees, they will keep in touch with them following release to see how things are going and to provide further support as needed. Other aspects of the Protocol involve ensuring that, as far as possible, other matters relating to, for example, outstanding cases are handled prior to release.

Comments

In the context of the work undertaken on the Reintegration Protocol a number of comments on the Inspection Report are offered.

Part 3 of the report concerning opportunities for self-improvement and access to services and activities pertains most to the context in which the Re-integration Protocol was developed and the arrangements needed for its effective implementation, specifically:

- We would whole heartedly support recommendation 74 to develop a strategic approach to working with external agencies, particularly to ensure that young people have the opportunity to engage with the services they will need following release. The work undertaken on the Reintegration Protocol has been taken forward with a wide range of partners, including HMYOI Polmont, and will support work on this recommendation;
- The Inspection Report recognises the positive contribution made by the case work team and also identifies the need to develop the role of the Personal Officer in supporting young people to achieve the outcomes in their Community Integration Plan. Development work on the Protocol also reflected this. Feedback to service providers from clients in Polmont about the case work team is that they are responsive, reliable and good at communicating with young people. Positive feedback from partners has also been received about the work of Plan B and the Links Centre. Protocol partners will engage closely with the case work team from the outset and Personal Officers as this role develops to support re-integration planning and delivery;
- The Inspection Report advocates that young people under 18 would benefit from being mentored back into the community and we agree that effective work with the younger age group is extremely important. The Lothian and Borders Protocol allows for this level of support for 18-20 year olds returning to Lothian and Borders acknowledging that their needs are often as extensive as a those of a 16/17 year old;

The Inspection Report identifies that relatively few referrals are made by Polmont to community based agencies following the 4 week pre-release review. The Protocol will ensure that re-integration planning and contact with community based agencies starts early in a young person's period in custody, with the goal of ensuring engagement following release;

- At the start of the Protocol process, the Lead Officer will convene a review meeting with a young person and member of the case work team soon after arriving at Polmont. This will be facilitated by early receipt of the Criminal Justice Social Work Report. Feedback from partners indicates this is not always received immediately. Discussion has taken place about the best way to ensure the CJSWR consistently arrives with or closely follows a young person to Polmont and is passed to the appropriate staff and Protocol Lead Officer;
- The inspection report identifies the need for more effective timetabling to increase participation in purposeful activities. Third sector providers have indicated that they have experienced low take up or changes to groups which has made delivery difficult. They look forward to more full involvement in activities and from a wider group of young people. As well, they suggest that young people are more motivated to participate in activities which engage their interest.

I wanted you to know that, as the Protocol was developed, the working group were incredibly fortunate to have the support of senior staff at HMYOI Polmont and in SPS Headquarters, recognising that there were a number of changes to key personnel over the same period. We look ahead to a period of stability as developments in the areas highlighted in the inspection report are taken forward and to supporting HMYOI Polmont going forward, especially in strengthening links to community based agencies in the delivery of services from inside to outside.

Finally, please find attached a flyer for the launch of the protocol – we would warmly welcome your attendance.

Yours sincerely



Rob Strachan
Chief Officer
Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority