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Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania Prison Surveys 2020

The results of the latest survey of prisoners and prison staff conducted by Tasmania's Custodial Inspector continue to identify a range of shortcomings regarding prisoner management and staff training within Tasmania Prison Services (TPS).

Custodial Inspector Mr Richard Connock said it was regrettable to continue to report major shortfalls across Tasmania's prison system substantiated by responses from prisoners and TPS staff in the latest results.

"The results of the surveys, analysed by the University of Tasmania's School of Social Sciences, were unfortunately of no surprise to me. For the most part, they relate to issues previously considered, and support my own findings, in previous inspection reports," said Mr Connock.

"The results demonstrate prolonged and persistent inadequacies in the system that have not been addressed despite continued affirmation by the Department of Justice (DoJ) that recommendations are being acted on," Mr Connock said.

"For example, despite a range of recommendations (38 in total) in my *Inspection of Adult Custodial Services in Tasmania 2018: Rehabilitation and Reintegration Inspection Report* regarding access to education and training, employment and reintegration services, that were supported by the Department the situation remains much the same," he said.

"Adding to this situation, is the fact that since that report TPS has in fact discontinued the drug and alcohol treatment program which previously operated in the Apsley Unit."

"There would appear to be no real change or increase in rehabilitation or reintegration programs and services for prisoners to access, in fact we have identified a decrease in delivery and an increase in lockdowns (see Lockdowns Review 2021)," said Mr Connock.

"In those circumstances, it is not surprising that the prisoner surveys indicate that insufficient and inadequate assistance is provided to prisoners pre and post release," he said.

Mr Connock said reporting of bullying within the TPS remains an ongoing issue with fear of reprisal a major deterrent to reporting highlighted by prisoner survey responses.

“Despite indicating that a new policy had been drafted and considered by the TPS Senior Management Team in September 2019, there has been no further action by TPS in respect to the draft policy to date.

“Rather, three procedural documents outlined in the Custody Inspection Report, which were noted in August 2019 as being out of date, are still in force,” he said.

In addition, responses by staff were just as concerning said Mr Connock and it appears again that little has been done to address major staff concerns.

“The survey results indicate that, unfortunately, staff perceptions about nepotism, bias and bullying have not changed since the 2019 survey and that low levels of confidence in TPS management remain,” he said.

“There was a clear sense from staff of nepotism and bias in relation to opportunities for recruitment and advancement, in particular family members of existing staff being appointed to TPS positions, and many staff felt unsupported by management and Human Resources to raise issues formally due to fears of repercussion, reprisal and/or inaction.”

“In regard to training, again DoJ advised TPS was undertaking further work to improve its process but staff perceptions about training remain unchanged.”

“Furthermore, my *Resources and Systems Inspection Report 2019* noted that TPS was delivering training that is compliant with the national training package as required by Inspection Standard 135.2 but this was not the case with two of the recruit schools facilitated in 2020 and subsequent training now has to be conducted as a result.”

Mr Connock stressed that the recommendations outlined in inspection reports are there to assist and develop proper processes to improve Tasmania’s prison system.

“Major issues raised in my inspection reports to date have not been addressed and whilst intentions may have been made to implement some recommendations, these attempts have either fallen short or not been administered adequately to achieve real change.”

See additional Key Findings 2020 Prisoner Survey and 2020 Staff Engagement Survey 2020 below.

Ends

Office of the Custodial Inspector Prison Surveys 2020 ([link](#))
Custodial Inspector reports ([link](#))

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ATTACHMENT 1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS 2020 PRISONER SURVEY

UTAS identified the key findings of the 2020 Prisoner Survey as follows:

- Prisoners identified that they do not receive enough assistance upon entering the prison system. They indicated there are shortfalls in specific service provision during incarceration including those pertaining to basic health needs and disabilities, through to therapeutic and rehabilitative services and programs.
- The availability of programs, education and training, and employment within the prison were of concern to prisoners. Relatively few indicated that existing programs and activities assisted them in achieving their sentence plan objectives and targets.
- Prisoners also indicated that assistance prior to release and post release was insufficient and inadequate. This includes employment, accommodation, education and training, welfare, drug and alcohol support, health and mental health support, and re-connecting with family and friends.
- The quality and quantity of food received was rated poorly by the majority of prisoners, and a majority of prisoners were dissatisfied with the canteen.
- Access to recreation was considered by most prisoners to be poor.
- While the majority of prisoners agreed that most TPS staff treat them with respect, a sizeable minority did not feel they were treated with respect.
- A majority of prisoners did not know who their 'case officer' is, although over half of said they knew they could turn to particular staff members if they had a problem.
- There were mixed responses in regards to encouragement for and having contact with family members, including by mail, phone and Zoom. The majority of prisoners said that it was difficult for their family and friends to attend the prison for visits.
- The issue of bullying and victimisation is prevalent, both by prisoners on other prisoners, and staff on prisoners. Most prisoners would not report such behaviour due to potential adverse consequences.
- Just under one third of prisoners indicated that they have developed a problem with illicit drugs and prescription medicine since they came into prison.

ATTACHMENT 2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS 2020 STAFF ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

UTAS identified the key findings of the 2020 Staff Engagement Survey as follows:

- The provision of relevant, quality pre-service (recruit stage) and in-service training (including on a continuous basis) was identified as an issue of concern by the majority of prison staff.
- There appeared to be an unhealthy disconnection between staff on-the-ground and the TPS leadership and management team, with a sizeable proportion (63% of respondents) of staff indicating low levels of confidence in TPS management, not feeling supported by management, and perceiving a general lack of consultation by management.
- A majority of staff members, however, do feel that their manager demonstrates an interest in their health and wellbeing, although there were mixed responses to questions about the technical expertise and leadership skills of managers, and whether managers recognise when staff perform a job well.
- Mixed results were also evident in responses to questions about health and wellbeing generally. A strong majority of staff were happy at their workplace, but nearly half also said that they did not feel valued at work for their contribution. Most felt that their workload was reasonable and that overtime shifts were distributed equally and fairly.
- Comments accompanying the survey indicated a number of perceived issues affecting staff within the TPS – the foremost of these being cronyism and nepotism, bullying and harassment amongst workers, covering up of the failings of the TPS, and staff feeling that they have been treated negatively in the course of their work.
- The professionalism of TPS staff was affirmed in the observations about how they pulled together as a team when an incident or operational situations arose; there was also recognition that support for staff was provided within the TPS and among staff themselves, and that communication of specific information was generally well done.