



Lanarkshire Community Justice Authority

Lanarkshire Community Justice Authority's Response to the Consultation of Independent Monitoring of Prisons

Is the monitoring role of Visiting Committees for Scottish Penal Establishments required to complement the scrutiny role of HM Inspectorate of Prisons?

The monitoring role of VC's is required full stop. VC's are in frequent contact with all establishments providing prisoners with a legal right to have VC's hear and investigate complaints. The role of HMIP is quite different and mainly involves visiting each prison on average every 4-5 years for the purpose of inspection. The monitoring role of VC's therefore compliments not just the role of HMIP but also that of the Governor, Officers and the wider Criminal Justice system as well as being an important contribution to Scotland's commitment to human rights by providing an independent community based monitoring role for those in custody.

Should Visiting Committees be developed, as envisaged by the 2005 Review of Visiting Committee and re-established as Independent Monitoring Boards?

Lanarkshire Community Justice Authority (LCJA) is of the view that there would be merit in re-establishing VC's as Independent Monitoring Boards similar to the arrangements in place in England and being adopted by many of our European neighbours. CJA's also recognise progress since the 2005 review which is noted in the consultation document in terms of:

- A full national and local training programme was developed and introduced in 2009.
- Training records for all VC members are now maintained.
- A comprehensive protocol for local authority VC member appointments was developed by the AVC and issued to all appointing local authorities.

CJA's are of the view that re-establishing the VC's as Independent Monitoring Boards will help continue such welcome recent developments.

Could the Government integrate the monitoring functions of Visiting Committees into HM Inspectorate of Prisons and remove Visiting Committees as separate public bodies?

Lanarkshire CJA have to register our surprise and disappointment that such a question should even arise. A fundamental principle of all recent developments in Scotland's Justice System has been to focus our efforts on the needs of the communities we serve and to involve those communities at the heart of what we all do.

This question raises the possibility of going in the opposite direction and centralising a function which currently involves approx 250 local people, including elected Councillors, visiting prisons in person and playing an active part in the Justice System. VC members are drawn from their communities, come from diverse backgrounds and provide independent real time scrutiny of conditions in prisons. Scotland has a right to be proud of the role VC's play on behalf of their Communities. CJA's would wish to see this role developed and look forward to working with our partners to help bring this about in the future.