

Division 66: Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, \$3 570 000 —

Ms J.M. Freeman, Chairman.

Mr J.M. Francis, Minister for Corrective Services.

Professor N.A. Morgan, Inspector of Custodial Services.

Mr D. Summers, Manager, Corporate Governance.

Ms N. Gibson, Acting Deputy Inspector.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Warnbro.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I refer to the bottom line on page 739 of budget paper No 2, which lists the increasing complexity of inspections due to the expanding prisoner population as a significant issue impacting the agency. Could the Inspector of Custodial Services, through the minister, explain what is meant by that?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Because this is an independent agency, I will have to refer most of the questions to the inspector.

Professor N.A. Morgan: The bottom line about the complexity is that as more prisoners are put in existing prisons, there are more issues for the agency to look at in terms of both the total prisoner population and, importantly, the underpinning services. In the case of Acacia Prison, for example, which has just had an expansion, it was originally designed for 700 to 800; its population went up initially to 1 000 and it is now at 1 400. Casuarina Prison was originally designed for 397 inmates; its population moved up to about 700, but it has a total capacity now of close to 1 000. That really changes the dynamics for us when we undertake inspections, which are about not just physical buildings and structures, but people, relationships and services.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Reference is made to the inspection program under “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators” on page 741. The inspector is no doubt familiar with the latest Auditor General’s report. Can the inspector say in the reports he delivers that compare the costs of prisons whether he or anyone else has taken into account the issue identified by the Auditor General that the front loading of the cost is on reception? All the state public prisons that receive prisoners—I do not think they are received into Acacia or Wandoo Reintegration Facility, but maybe I am wrong about Wandoo—lump that cost onto the public sector prison system. Is that then attributed to the per day, per prisoner cost that the inspector is comparing, or is he able to extract that cost and make a like-for-like comparison?

Professor N.A. Morgan: I think I am on the public record already as saying that in my opinion the simple comparison of the cost per prisoner per day from one facility to another is not accurate because different prisons serve very different purposes. As the member points out, somewhere such as Hakea Prison, which is a reception and receptional prison, has some dramatically unwell people arrive on its doorstep—unwell through mental illness or drugs or whatever. Acacia is a medium-security prison—not maximum—for sentenced prisoners. Clearly, there are differentials that need to be taken into account there. I am very well aware of the issue of the upfront cost and the short-term roll in, roll out issue. As the member for Warnbro said in debate on the previous division, that is probably particularly applicable to the short-term remand and fine default areas. I was interested because I have not previously been given a figure of any description around the actual cost and I am not sure what the breakdown is between the different facilities, but obviously I look forward to hearing that information that I believe will be provided as supplementary information.

Mr P. PAPALIA: In that regard, it would suggest to me that it makes Hakea really competitive with Acacia. If the agency were able to take into account that front loading and the extent to which the prison has to deal with that cost by comparison, I would suggest—this is just an observation—that it would be worth investigating that comparative cost. Does the public sector comparator, often employed for comparisons between private and public prisons, take into account that front-loading cost?

[12.50 pm]

Professor N.A. Morgan: I am not sure whether the public sector comparator does. Often I am not always briefed on these detailed matters. I think the recent Economic Regulation Authority discussion papers, which have a chart on the comparative cost of different prisons, certainly raises some very interesting questions, because obviously the regional prisons are by far the most expensive per capita to run. The other area that really does merit, in my opinion, some further exploration is the issue of the total cost of Acacia, which must factor in the costs incurred by the department in providing central services and supports.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It should not.

Professor N.A. Morgan: My recent report on Acacia, which was published in this current financial year, pointed out that at one time we were being told that the on-costs were in the region of 30 per cent, close to one-third. In the latest report, the department told us that the on-costs from its end were in the region of 13 per cent to 15 per cent. I am concerned by that discrepancy, and it is a matter that I will continue to explore. We have in fact got an inspection coming up at Acacia at the end of this year. On the three-yearly cycle it would not in fact be due until the end of 2016 but, because the contract expires in 2016 and because of some of the concerns we had in 2013, I brought that forward by 12 months. So, it may be an issue that we will canvass then.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Further to that, is that 13 per cent to 15 per cent of Acacia's current costs?

Professor N.A. Morgan: Yes.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is transferred to the public system?

Professor N.A. Morgan: One of the basic measuring posts, and it is a very crude one, that we have tried to employ is to say, "Okay, we know how much we pay Serco; it is X number of dollars. So, as a percentage of what is paid to Serco, what are the department's additional costs in providing those central services?" I am not silly enough to think that we can come down with an absolute dollar and cents figure. I have called in the Acacia report for a robust estimate, and for that robust estimate to be published each year in the annual reports on Acacia, and then we will probably be in a position to better understand those comparative figures.

Mr P. PAPALIA: If we then add in this component, it might be really interesting.

The CHAIRMAN: I will take that as a comment. Member for Murray-Wellington.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I refer to page 741 of the budget papers. I would like advice on when the office will be conducting a review of the now reopened, or continuing to be opened, Broome Regional Prison. When would that be likely to occur?

Professor N.A. Morgan: Quite recently we reviewed and published a very positive report on the West Kimberley Regional Prison. At the same time we also included the inspection of Broome within that inspection report. The report on West Kimberley Regional Prison is actually a report on the two prisons, or what was at that time the annexe, as it was called, of Broome. I fully intend to keep a very sharp eye on what is happening at Broome because I think it is my responsibility to really make sure that we are aware of the physical deficiencies, but we also know that even where a place has physical deficiencies, if it has the right human services and the right people, then to some extent it can lift above that environment. I will certainly be keeping a sharp eye by way of ongoing liaising visits. At least four times a year we will go to Broome as well as West Kimberley. On top of that, I will decide exactly when we do the next inspection. But as the member appreciates, we have a three-yearly reporting time frame to Parliament, but that is one which I may choose to bring forward.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I have a further question.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you make it quick?

Mr M.J. COWPER: Very quick. The decision to keep it open, obviously, would have had to weigh heavily on the minister's mind. Notwithstanding that, did the inspector have input into the decision to keep it open?

Professor N.A. Morgan: I certainly spoke with the minister about it. I think if we go back over time, I spoke with the member for Murray-Wellington when he was also the minister. There was certainly a strong push from the Department of Corrective Services at one point to close the prison and to close it quite quickly. At that stage it appeared that the best option was to transition to closure in a staged and careful and structured way. I also understand the reasoning behind why it has now been decided to keep it open. I think the key is, as I said earlier, the provision of services and to make sure that Broome, which is a high maintenance and quite high cost prison, continues to be resourced adequately for its population. I do believe it has a future role for local minimum security men, for prisoners who want or need to go up there for a short period of time for cultural or family reasons for visits, even when they might be imprisoned in other prisons, and also as a remand centre. In the longer term, developing on what was said in the previous division, in my view clearly there needs to be a new facility.

The appropriation was recommended.