

Inspector's Overview

Emergency management in response to a major incident

Loss of control is every prison administrator's worst nightmare. This is effectively what happened over several hours at Greenough Regional Prison during the afternoon and evening of 24 July 2018.

The Department acted quickly and commissioned Ms Jan Shuard PSM to undertake a review of what happened, focussing on causal factors, responses, and opportunities for improvement. Ms Shuard's report identified the four phases of emergency management as: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. Her report and recommendations largely address the first three phases and also the immediate recovery response.

The focus of this inspection was to look at the fourth phase, recovery, over the weeks and months following the incident. We undertook the fieldwork for the inspection from August 2018 until early 2019. We made several site visits, analysed documents and information and, most importantly, spoke with staff and prisoners who were at Greenough at the time of the incident.

Post-incident management

Following any sort of major incident, it is common practice to undertake a critical review into what happened to identify lessons learned and improve response mechanisms for the future.

Our inspection examined the post-incident management and recovery in the months following the incident. Like Ms Shuard, we were focussed on opportunities for improvement rather than criticising what happened. This report sets out what we saw and heard and what the evidence tells us. No doubt some may interpret what we say as criticism or wisdom with the benefit of hindsight, but this is not our intention. The reader's focus should be on how better planning and preparedness can make post-incident recovery more structured, efficient and effective for all involved.

There were many complexities facing the prison and the Department following the incident.

It was clear from our work that prisoners were denied many basic rights and were held in unacceptable conditions. That said, in the immediate aftermath of the incident there may have been little that the prison or Department could reasonably have done given the state of the prison, the police investigation, the lack of suitable alternatives, and the geographical context. However, as the days became weeks and the weeks became months, we have identified that there were unnecessary delays in the return to a normal regime. Our report highlights many illustrative examples, particularly for prisoners who remained at Greenough. Somewhat ironically, male prisoners identified as either escapees or persons of interest as rioters, who were transferred from Greenough to Hakea, were subjected to a much shorter period of restricted regimes or lockdowns than those who remained at Greenough.

Further, we identified that many of the women and men had suffered traumatic effects from the riot.

Staff too were traumatised by the events on the night. There were several supports in place for staff, including counselling and welfare support, but many staff spoke of the impact it had on them personally.

Welcomed response

We have made several findings and five recommendations. All bar one of the recommendations are focussed on recovery planning. The objective is to have a systemic recovery plan available following an emergency or major incident.

The Department has accepted 4 of the 5 recommendations in our report. Importantly, they acknowledged the need for structured post-incident planning and intend to develop a structured prison centric post-incident recovery plan for prisoners and staff.

Publication of this report has been delayed for several months due to my transition into this role following appointment in May this year. At the time of writing, although significant progress has been made, Units 2 and 3 are still not open. There are, however, comprehensive long term plans being developed for improvements to the women's precinct. We will continue to monitor progress as part of our ongoing liaison work with the prison.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the cooperation and assistance we received during this inspection from key prison and Department staff, many of whom were already very busy with the recovery work.

It is also important to acknowledge the hard work of the inspection team who contributed so much to our inspection, particularly Charlie Staples for his work in planning the inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan

Inspector