

2024 INSPECTION OF GREENOUGH REGIONAL PRISON

GREENOUGH MAY HAVE TURNED A CORNER ON THE ROAD TO IMPROVEMENT

Several of our past inspection reports for Greenough Regional Prison have been critical, focussing on the negatives or areas requiring improvement. But during our inspection in July 2024, we saw several areas of improvement that deserve acknowledgment.

Greenough's management and staff were future focussed and optimistic. There was a growing appetite for change and improvement evident across many of the areas we inspected. That is not to paint too rosy a picture, as there are still many areas in need of investment or improvement in services and supports.

Staff in Greenough work hard and most were committed to working collegiately in providing services to prisoners. There was noticeable improvement with a more positive attitude and perspective shared by many staff we heard from during the inspection. Of course, with a workforce of over 200 it is never going to be perfect and there were still complaints about conflict and friction between some staff. Common complaints from staff related to more systemic issues like the impact of record prison populations, regular staffing shortages, and infrastructure limitations.

Some staff said they had always tried to 'make it work' in response to system level deficits but did so without recognition or thanks. These are frustrations we often hear during our inspection work in response to common problems seen in most prisons.

Most individuals in the workplace have autonomy around how they view the environment in which they work. Individuals can choose to be optimistic and focus on the positives, and that is what we saw in many staff at Greenough. But the concerns of staff, including the pessimistic ones, are worth listening to and this highlights the need for continued attention to the sources of these frustrations at the local level and also across the prison system.

Since the inspection there has been a local recruit school completed which has resulted in a welcomed increase in custodial staffing levels. The Department's response to this report also noted efforts to recruit additional staff including clinical staff and Vocational Support Officers. Both are commendable initiatives.

We have been regularly briefed by the Department on the development of a strategic plan together with reforms around long term infrastructure and workforce planning. The Department's response to the draft of this report notes that this plan is nearing completion. This should open opportunities for greater focus and direction in Greenough and perhaps harness some of the enthusiasm we observed.

Pleasingly, the Department's response also highlighted proactive steps taken by local leadership to address some of the issues identified in our inspection. Examples included: the Superintendent meeting with off-country prisoners to seek input into what additional support they could be offered; the appointment of additional unit recreation workers; ordering additional recreation equipment; improving the quantity of breakfast packs; and consulting with other prisons to explore options to improve food quality and quantity.

Record increases in the Western Australian prison population have had a significant impact in every facility. Greenough has not been spared from this and there has been additional pressure on both staff and prisoners. Areas where this has been most noticeable include, accommodation, infrastructure, and the availability and access to support services, like health, education, employment, and the ability for prisoners to maintain contact with family and friends.

But two groups in particular stand out in Greenough: women, and off-country men.

Up to 20% of the male population at the time of our inspection were from the Pilbara or Kimberley regions. They shared with us their experience of loss being away from home and the impact this has on their wellbeing. But commendably, prison leadership at Greenough recognise their situation and are doing what they can to make life easier for this group.

Women in Greenough, prior to February 2024, were housed within a specialist women's precinct in Unit 4. But population demands across the system meant that in early 2024 they were moved out of Unit 4 and relocated, initially to Perth, but eventually back to Greenough in Unit 5. Despite the efforts of local staff, Unit 5 does not offer the same level of amenity or access to services that was available to the women when they were in Unit 4.

Women and off country men in Greenough are the face of system wide pressures and should remain at the forefront of efforts to improve their situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have one Independent Prison Visitor for Greenough at the time of our inspection. They are a community volunteer, appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services, who attends Greenough on a regular basis observing the operations of the prison and providing an opportunity for the men and women placed there to raise issues and complaints to inform the work of our office. I acknowledge the importance of the work undertaken and thank them for their contribution to our ongoing monitoring of conditions in Greenough.

I also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Greenough and from key personnel in the Department. The men and women living in Greenough who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Liz George for her work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan

Inspector of Custodial Services

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