



2025 INSPECTION OF
ROEBOURNE REGIONAL
PRISON

169

JUNE 2026

*Independent oversight
that contributes to a more
accountable public sector*



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

The Inspector of Custodial Services and staff acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this country, and their continuing connection to land, waters, and community throughout Australia. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders, be they past or present.

Artwork Acknowledgement

Marcia McGuire – Kolbang ‘Going Forward’ (2025)

Format: Digital illustration (cover uses elements)

The artwork *Kolbang* – meaning ‘going forward’ – depicts the positive impacts the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has on the custodial estate in Western Australia.

The artwork embodies traditional knowledge passed on from Marcia McGuire’s families of the Whadjuk, Ballardong, Yued Noongar and Badimia Yamatji Aboriginal People.



2025 Inspection of Roebourne Regional Prison

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June 2026
ISSN 1445-3134 (Print)
ISSN 2204-4140 (Electronic)

This report is available on the Office’s website and will be made available, upon request, in alternate formats.



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Inspector's Overview

Recent improvements are welcomed, but Roebourne Regional Prison is facing many ongoing challenges

Roebourne Regional Prison (Roebourne) operates in a challenging regional environment, where workforce constraints, infrastructure limitations, and service delivery pressures intersect. This inspection found that while these structural challenges remain significant, there are emerging signs of stability and improved organisational cohesion.

Staffing pressures continue to have a material impact on the prison's day-to-day operations. Shortages across both custodial and non-custodial roles are affecting the delivery of services and the daily regime of the prison. Regular daily shortfalls are driven by a combination of factors, including high levels of workers' compensation leave, difficulties in recruiting staff in a competitive labour market, and ongoing housing constraints in the local area. Roebourne is not unique in this; we see similar challenges during inspections of every regional prison.

There were significant issues around access to services, particularly health and mental health services. Despite having a permanent mental health nurse, the lack of access to a psychiatrist, even via tele-health, was having a major impact. Men and women in need of mental health diagnosis or treatment review, often presented with behavioural issues raising risks to the safety of both staff and prisoners. While the peer support network was working very well and provided valuable support, it cannot be a substitute for specialist care.

Limited access to suitable programs, meaningful employment and structured recreation were also identified as consequences of daily staff shortfalls.

Despite these pressures, the inspection found more positive sentiment among staff about how the prison is currently operating, particularly when compared to previous inspections. Many staff expressed cautious optimism about the direction of the prison and its ability to improve.

However, these gains remain fragile. Sustained improvement will depend on addressing the underlying workforce challenges that continue to limit the prison's capacity to operate an effective daily routine. Without progress in this area, there is a risk that pressures on staff and services will persist, undermining conditions for both people in custody and staff.

There were several highlights identified during the inspection demonstrating what can be achieved in regional facilities through local initiatives and partnerships. The prison has a longstanding and impressive partnership with the Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Martu organisation from the East Pilbara who deliver a cultural education and transition program for Martu men and women in Roebourne. Another initiative is a staff cultural appreciation program led by an Aboriginal staff member who works closely with prisoners holding cultural knowledge, language and connections to local family groups.

During the inspection, we were also able to attend the first graduation of men having completed a Certificate II in Rail Infrastructure through the *Bulujari Guma* (meaning forward together) program. This was an impressive partnership with local businesses and organisations providing valuable

employment skills. The prison also runs a barista program, and training in operating a radio program in conjunction with the local radio station. We hope these programs can continue and become embedded in the operations of the prison.

The most pleasing observation was the completion of the project to install air conditioning in the main accommodation units within the prison. Both staff and prisoners spoke highly of the positive impact this has had on prisoner welfare and general behaviour within the prison.

Women remain a marginalised group in Roebourne. The women's unit is small with a capacity for around 14, although this is often exceeded resulting in women sleeping on a mattress on the floor. Most women were held on remand which leads to high turnover and fluctuating numbers. These factors and staffing shortfalls often meant that limited supports or activities were available for the women. Women were only employed in their unit as cleaners and did not have access to meaningful opportunities for education, programs, or rehabilitation support.

We heard that because of the fluctuating numbers and the remand status it was not possible to provide additional support. Although this may be the case now, this argument is premised on having only one approach to supporting women in a small regional prison. A better way to look at this problem might be to understand the characteristics of the female population in Roebourne (i.e., predominantly local Aboriginal women held for relatively short periods on remand) and then design a general program that meets some of their needs, rather than saying the cohort do not fit within the existing programs. This is an issue we will explore further as part of our current review into remand prisoners.

The report highlights the need for coordinated, system-level responses to meet many challenges facing regional prisons, particularly in relation to recruitment, retention, and workforce wellbeing. Ensuring that facilities such as Roebourne are adequately resourced is essential to maintaining safe, secure, and humane custodial environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We had, until recently, two Independent Prison Visitors for Roebourne who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attended the prison on a regular basis observing operations and providing an opportunity for the prisoners to raise issues and complaints. The reports they provided after each visit informed the work of our office, and throughout the period of their appointment they advocated strongly for improvements in conditions for the men and women held there. I acknowledge the importance of the work undertaken and thank them for their contribution to our ongoing monitoring of Roebourne.

I also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Roebourne and from key personnel in the Department.

The men and women living in Roebourne who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

We had two independent experts join us for this inspection. I am very grateful for the expertise provided by Ms Helen Gabriel, from the Office of the Inspector of Detention Services, Queensland

Ombudsman, and Ms Shayna Burton, an environmental health expert with the WA Department of Health.

I acknowledge the contribution and hard work of the team in our office who were involved in undertaking this inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Kieran Artelaris for his work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

23 June 2026

Summary of Findings

Achieving strategic objectives was dependent on staffing

Roebourne Prison demonstrated clear strategic direction, maintaining its own local strategic plan and ensuring prompt alignment with the new Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025–2030. Operations and service delivery were significantly constrained by custodial and non-custodial staff shortages, with recruitment and retention impacted by limited housing availability. At the prison level though, delivery of staff training had increased and staff morale had improved.

Focus on safety and security was limited by resources

Low resourcing in the security team limited its capacity to maintain oversight, gather intelligence and respond proactively, with staff largely occupied by compliance tasks. Interaction between staff and prisoners had declined, and incentives for positive behaviour were undermined by population pressures, limited accommodation flexibility and a lack of meaningful employment opportunities. Emergency preparedness had improved through stronger interagency engagement, targeted training and more structured exercises.

Living conditions had improved but infrastructure was old

Living conditions at Roebourne had improved, particularly following the long-awaited installation of air-conditioning in all cells. This had a positive impact on prisoner wellbeing and overall behaviour, with strong positive feedback from both staff and prisoners. However, the prison's ageing infrastructure was increasingly under strain from a growing population and some areas were no longer fit for purpose. While general hygiene standards were acceptable, they were not consistently maintained, with some communal ablutions and unit kitchens requiring more regular and thorough cleaning.

Daily routine and activities were regularly disrupted

Daily life for prisoners had become more restrictive due to ongoing staff shortages. Prisoner services were disrupted and they spent more time in their cells. Opportunities for structured recreation were limited, particularly for women, due to the Recreation VSOs being consistently redeployed. Prisoner employment options were sparse and meaningful employment was inconsistent across the site.

Servicing physical and mental health was challenging

Primary health services at Roebourne were disrupted due to frequent closures of the medical centre due to redeployment and lack of availability of officers to staff the health centre. Availability of dental services was scarce. Mental health services were constrained by the absence of both on-site and telehealth psychiatric support, leaving many prisoners potentially undiagnosed and untreated. In this context, peer support played a critical role in assisting vulnerable prisoners, supported by strong leadership from the PSO, whose effective management, careful selection of peer supporters, and focus on staff wellbeing was a strength of the peer support program at Roebourne.

Rehabilitative services were impacted by short staffing

The remand population at Roebourne had increased from 34% in 2022 to 66% in 2025. This cohort was not adequately supported by existing services. They fell outside established pre-release pathways, as responsibility for their support was unclear and not covered by re-entry services. Education delivery was frequently disrupted by custodial staff shortages and associated closures; however, the education team maintained strong throughput by prioritising short, targeted courses, alongside implementing some positive new initiatives. Engagement with pre-release and re-entry services had declined.

Women prisoners were a disadvantaged minority

Women had limited access to core services, activities, and opportunities. The absence of a consistent Women's Support Officer limited coordination, advocacy, and engagement, while staffing pressures meant the women's unit was frequently locked down. Women could not undertake their mandated programs as these were only provided for men at Roebourne. Women need dedicated facilities, staffing and services to address this structural disadvantage.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Page	DOJ Response
Recommendation 1 Implement strategies to address the key factors contributing to custodial staffing shortages at Roebourne.	7	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 2 Increase resources for the security team.	10	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 3 Permanently establish the Facilities Manager position.	13	Supported – Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 4 Increase staff presence and oversight of cleaning in the units.	14	Supported
Recommendation 5 Increase employment opportunities and maximise the use of employment positions that already exist for both male and female prisoners.	20	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 6 Ensure e-visits are operating effectively.	21	Supported – Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 7 Ensure dental services are available to prisoners at Roebourne.	23	Noted
Recommendation 8 Ensure psychiatric services are available to prisoners at Roebourne.	24	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 9 Provide adequate resources to support remand prisoners.	26	Not supported
Recommendation 10 Ensure adult basic education is prioritised and adequately resourced.	28	Supported – Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 11 Plan for a more suitable facility for incarcerated women in the Pilbara.	31	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 12 Increase resources, support and access to services for women prisoners.	31	Supported in Principle

Background

This was the tenth inspection of Roebourne Regional Prison (Roebourne) conducted by the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (the Office).

The prison is located in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, five kilometres from the town of Roebourne, 40 kilometres from Karratha, and about 1,500 kilometres north of Perth. The Traditional Owners of the land are the Ngarluma people.

The prison opened in 1984 and was originally a minimum-security facility before being upgraded to medium security in 1995. It holds both men and women, on remand or sentenced, and all security classifications. Medium- and minimum-security prisoners are held for longer periods, but maximum-security prisoners are only held on a short-term basis.

A minimum-security work camp was opened adjacent to the prison in June 2014. The work camp has 25 beds for male prisoners only. It was not within the scope of this inspection, having been looked at during our work camps inspection earlier in 2025 (OICS, 2025a).

Lack of climate control in the prison had been a longstanding problem. Roebourne is located in one of the hottest climate zones in Australia. Monitoring undertaken during our 2022 inspection showed the temperatures in cells without air-conditioning averaged over 32 degrees throughout the night.

Positively, after more than 20 years of recommendations by this office, the Department of Justice (the Department) installed air-conditioning in all cells at Roebourne. This project ran from September 2024 – July 2025 at a cost of around \$16 million. Over that period, the prison population was reduced with one unit at a time closed while installation works were undertaken.



ROEBOURNE REGIONAL PRISON

FACT PAGE

ROLE OF FACILITY

Roebourne is the receival facility for the Pilbara region. It holds both men and women, remand or sentenced, and all security classifications. There is also a work camp attached to the prison for eligible minimum-security prisoners.

HISTORY

Roebourne opened in 1984 as a minimum-security facility before being upgraded to medium security in 1995. It had a capacity of 116 prisoners.

Since then capacity has increased by installing additional beds. At the time of this inspection, capacity was 187 which included 14 beds for women.

A minimum-security work camp was opened adjacent to the prison in June 2014. The work camp has 25 beds for male prisoners.

In 2025, air conditioning was installed in all cells. Prior to that, air conditioning had only been available in the maximum-security and women's units.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

187

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

206

as at 24 November 2025

PRISONERS SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR

11



The prison is located in Roebourne on Ngarluma land, 1,500 kilometres north of Perth.



INSPECTION DATE

24 - 28 November 2025



The Inspection Process

This inspection was guided by the Office's *Inspection Standards for Adult Custodial Services* (the Standards) (OICS, 2025b), which draws on expectations and rights established in relevant international treaties and guidelines. The Standards provide a framework for assessing the performance of custodial facilities.

The scope of this inspection was refined to focus on 16 of the 33 adult standards, across six of the eight core themes. The scoping was based on the assessment of available evidence such as liaison visit reports, data on key indicators, a self-assessment completed by the Superintendent, and themes arising from Independent Visitor reports.

Before the on-site inspection, surveys were conducted with prisoners and staff, and interviews were held with departmental staff, key prison personnel, and service providers. Additional documents from the Department and a demographic data pack also informed the inspection's lines of inquiry.

The on-site inspection took place over five days in November 2025. It involved engagement with management, staff, and prisoners; observation of key processes; and review of relevant documentation. At the end of the inspection week, a debrief was held with senior management to present preliminary findings.

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on evidence gathered throughout the inspection process. Generative artificial intelligence has been used to summarise inspection notes to prepare an early draft. This draft is then subject to human oversight, proofing and editing to ensure accuracy, clarity, and readability. The Department was provided with an opportunity to respond to recommendations within this report.



1 Achieving strategic objectives was dependent on staffing

Roebourne had developed a strategic plan that was communicated and reinforced to staff by senior managers. However, the prison's capacity to achieve strategic objectives, deliver services and even run a consistent daily routine was hindered by chronic staffing shortages. Despite challenges, recent developments had improved staff relationships and access to staff training had also increased.

This chapter assesses the performance of Roebourne against the following standards:

Standard 1 – Operational planning

A strategic vision informs a comprehensive plan of the custodial facility's priorities, principles, values, and actions.

Standard 2 – Human resources

All staff possess the necessary skills and authority to manage people in custody safely and effectively.

1.1 The prison had a strategic plan with clear and appropriate priorities

Roebourne had a strategic plan that had been recently revised to align with the *Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025–2030* released in July 2025. There had been no strategic plan for corrective services in Western Australia since 2018, so this was an important development. During this period, many prisons had stopped producing local strategic plans or business plans in the absence of an overarching strategy. But Roebourne continued to develop its own local strategic plans to guide its operations.

The Roebourne strategic plan included values and principles, and identified the following four priority areas:

- Build a strong culture of safety, respect and trust.
- Ensure staff, prisoner and community safety.
- Create an environment that facilitates positive change.
- Drive better outcomes and positive change for the Aboriginal people in our care.

We consider the last of these to be particularly important, recognising that 90% of Roebourne prisoners were Aboriginal. This focus was positively reflected in some valuable initiatives within the prison, as outlined in the following section.

1.2 Roebourne benefitted from some excellent cultural initiatives

For many years now, Roebourne has benefitted from a valuable relationship with Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), a Martu organisation based in Martu country in the east Pilbara. A team from KJ visits every 4–6 weeks to deliver an education and transition program to Martu people in custody at

Roebourne. Referred to simply as the Martu program, the sessions aim to help strengthen identity, build understanding of the justice system, and support informed decision-making. They support Martu people to plan for life after release, seek cultural guidance, and navigate the justice system with more confidence. In 2025, they delivered 51 workshops.

Another more recent initiative was the development of a Cultural Appreciation Program to help prison staff better understand the unique history and cultures of the region's five traditional custodian groups. This was led by an Aboriginal staff member, working closely with prisoners as holders of cultural knowledge and language, and in consultation with local family groups. The program used photos, maps, illustrations and language recordings, and included creation stories, post-colonisation history, language groups, family and skin groups, behavioural styles, cultural traditions, and common words from several local languages. The aim was to strengthen staff cultural capability and support respectful, culturally sensitive interactions in daily prison life. We consider it to be best practice as a cultural awareness program and commend all involved in its development.



Photo 1: The cultural area in the prison quadrangle features artwork created by prisoners.

1.3 Staff shortages affected operations and service delivery

Prison operations and service delivery were heavily impacted by custodial officer shortages. In addition, service delivery was affected by difficulties in recruiting and retaining non-custodial staff in some key positions.

Several factors contributed to frequent shortages of custodial staff

Daily custodial staffing shortages were caused by a combination of vacant positions, personal leave, and workers' compensation leave. At the time of our inspection, the prison had a total of 68 prison officer positions and six of these were vacant (9%). In addition, there were 12 prison officers on workers' compensation leave (18%). Over the preceding nine months, an average of 3.4 prison officers per day were on personal leave (5%). Using these figures, on any given day, 30% or more of the custodial workforce was likely to be unavailable.

This had been an ongoing problem at Roebourne. In fact, the situation had been worse at times in the 12 months before the inspection, with up to 12 prison officer vacancies and 17 on workers' compensation leave.

Workers' compensation leave is a particular issue at Roebourne. In our review of *Workers' compensation trends in WA prisons*, we found that Roebourne had the highest proportion of staff on workers' compensation leave in the state with 44% of the workforce on workers' compensation at some point in 2024. (OICS, 2025c, pp. 6–7). Staff on workers' compensation leave were not backfilled and this contributed significantly to daily staff shortages.

Positions that were substantively vacant could be filled, but this had been difficult to achieve. Although there was a long list of prison officers who had expressed interest in transferring to Roebourne from other prisons, there were a number of factors that prevented or delayed this. Prison officer transfers required approval from a centralised committee, and because there were custodial staff shortages across the prison system, such approvals had been limited.

Relocating to the Pilbara was a major lifestyle change for most. Many officers found their personal circumstances had changed since they put their name on the transfer list and they were no longer willing to transfer to Roebourne. While trying to fill a vacant position in the first half of 2025, Roebourne offered a transfer to 14 officers who declined before one finally accepted. This added to the delay in filling the vacant position.

Lack of housing was a barrier to both custodial and non-custodial recruitment

The most significant barrier to filling vacant positions was the lack of available housing. There were a range of incentives available to attract staff to work at Roebourne, including regional allowances and leave entitlements. But the most effective incentive was access to housing via the Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) program, with all rent paid by the Department. Unfortunately, the rental property market in the region was highly competitive and the supply of GROH properties did not meet the demand generated by various state government departments. The prison had a shortfall of eight houses – this meant there were eight positions that could not be filled because there was no housing to offer. The high cost of rent in the area meant it was not financially viable for potential recruits to rent privately, even if they could find an available property.

This was equally the case for custodial and non-custodial positions. The employment market in the Pilbara region was highly competitive, and the Department was generally unable to match the pay and conditions available in the resources sector.

These various factors combined to create an ongoing short staffing crisis in the prison. We acknowledge these issues are not easy to resolve, particularly as short staffing is reflected across the prison system. But Roebourne needed support to address the key factors – vacancies, workers’ compensation, and housing – that contributed to chronic short staffing. It was, without question, the most significant issue facing the prison and it impacted on all areas of operation, as discussed throughout this report.

Recommendation 1

Implement strategies to address the key factors contributing to custodial staffing shortages at Roebourne.

1.4 There had been some improvement in staff morale

Several years of persistent short staffing, harsh climate, and poor infrastructure had combined to create challenging working conditions for Roebourne staff. Morale and workforce culture had been poor, and the relationship between staff and senior management had suffered.

A change of Superintendent in mid-2025 offered an opportunity to reset. The incoming Superintendent (who had previously been Assistant Superintendent Operations) recognised the need to rebuild the relationship between staff and management. She focused on increasing communication, team building and positive leadership, and recognising the efforts of staff. This linked back to one of the priorities in the strategic plan – ‘Build a culture of safety, respect and trust’.

Feedback from staff during the inspection was consistently positive. They reported that the prison had become a better workplace in the past six months, and they recognised the efforts of the Superintendent and other members of senior management. This was also reflected in the results of our pre-inspection staff survey, in which respondents rated both support and communication from local management substantially higher than during our previous inspection in 2022.

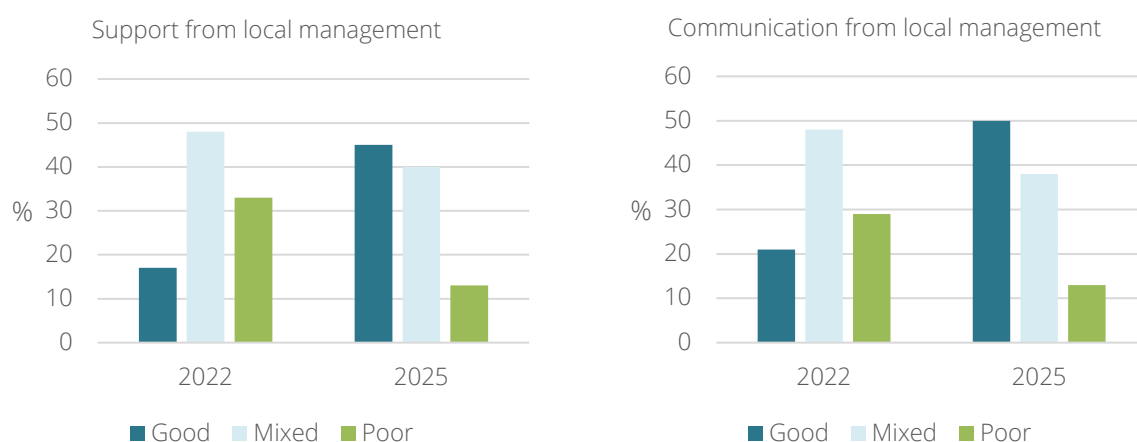


Figure 1: Rating of support and communication from local management (% of staff survey respondents)

At the time of our inspection, another change of leadership was pending. The Roebourne Superintendent and the Superintendent of Greenough Regional Prison were effectively swapping positions, with this change due to take place in December 2025. Although staff expressed regret at the departure of the Superintendent, they were optimistic about the future direction of the prison.

1.5 Delivery of staff training had increased

Training delivery at the prison had strengthened over the past year, driven by greater stability in the Satellite Training Officer (STO) position. Earlier in the year, all STO positions across the state had moved back under the management of the Corrective Services Academy, rather than the prison superintendents. This ensured the positions were protected from redeployment, allowing a sustained focus on training planning and delivery. Prior to that, the Roebourne STO had been redeployed for up to 75% of the time over a period of 12–18 months.

Training statistics had improved markedly – compliance with mandatory training requirements had increased from 27% to 91% over the course of 2025. There was a training facility in the prison that met all needs and all necessary equipment was available.



Photo 2: Training equipment in the staff training area.

2 Focus on safety and security was limited by resources

The security team had limited resources and was regularly impacted by redeployment because of custodial staff shortages. The same shortages contributed to decreased interaction between staff and prisoners and combined with population pressure to undermine the system of earned privileges and incentives. Recent training and inter-agency collaboration had enhanced emergency preparedness.

This chapter assesses the performance of Roebourne against the following standards:

Standard 25 – Encouraging positive behaviour

The relationship between staff and people in custody is positive and respectful, fostering pro-social behaviours and personal responsibility.

Standard 30 – Relational security

Effective relationships between staff and people in custody foster a safe and humane custodial environment.

Standard 32 – Incident and emergency management

The facility aligns its prevention and response systems with assessed risk, implements approved protocols for serious incidents, and conducts ongoing monitoring for indicators of potential disturbances.

2.1 Low resources in the security team resulted in reduced capacity

The security team operated with minimal staffing, and this reduced its capacity to gather intelligence, maintain consistent oversight and respond proactively to emerging risks. The team comprised only two positions: the Security Manager and one Senior Officer Security. The Senior Officer Security was frequently redeployed to cover shortages throughout the prison, further reducing capacity.

The Senior Officer Security role was not permanently filled and functioned as a rolling position, with officers typically in place for around three months at a time. This turnover meant skills and knowledge were not retained. It also created a repeated training burden that absorbed the Security Manager's time.

With such limited resources, the team could not maintain a consistent presence across the prison. Much of their time was consumed by compliance requirements and paperwork, with which they struggled to keep up. They had very little time to engage with prisoners and staff on the floor and to build the rapport that supports effective intelligence gathering.

The prison was seeking additional staff for the security team in its submission for a new staffing level agreement (SLA). The status of the SLA was unknown at the time of the inspection. Fundamentally, the security team needed more resources to operate more effectively.

Recommendation 2

Increase resources for the security team.

2.2 Interaction between staff and prisoners had decreased

Survey results and observations during the inspection indicated a decline in interaction between unit officers and prisoners. Only 58% of staff survey respondents felt that staff and prisoners generally got on well (down from 69% in 2022). Only 52% of prisoner survey respondents said unit officers would help with issues of concern (down from 59% in 2022). During the inspection, prisoners reported more time locked behind grilles and reduced access to officers. This was consistent with our observations.

The design of the units meant prisoners had no access to the unit office when wing grilles were locked. Officers were rarely to be found in the wings unless they were carrying out specific tasks such as cell searches or population counts. Prisoners who wanted to make an enquiry were often seen standing at the grilles waving their arms to attract attention.

The regular locking of wing grilles and reduced officer presence in the wings was driven by the ongoing staff shortages. Often the units simply did not have enough staff to maintain direct supervision in the wings and so opportunities for routine, informal interaction with prisoners were limited.

One of the impacts of reduced interaction is a weakening of relational security, which relies on strong relationships and trust between staff and prisoners. This is the basis for staff to maintain their knowledge of the prisoner group and identify any emerging risks.

The reduced level of supervision also meant that work carried out by prisoners inside the unit, particularly cleaning, was not being monitored. This was reflected in the poor condition of unit bathrooms and kitchens as discussed below [see 3.3].

2.3 Incentives for positive behaviour were not consistent

The prison attempted to use a hierarchy of accommodation as an incentive framework for positive behaviour, with Unit 2 positioned as a privileged unit that men were expected to reach by progressing from Unit 1. Men who reached minimum-security classification could also aspire to the work camp located in front of the main prison. Unit 2 had only recently been reinstated as a privileged unit because the prison had operated with one unit closed for the duration of the air-conditioning project. The criteria for placement in Unit 2 included behaviour standards (no incidents or negative notes for three months) and holding a job within the prison.

However, it was increasingly difficult to apply this consistently. Population pressure was growing, reducing flexibility and limiting the ability to reserve Unit 2 for those who met the intended criteria. At the same time, there were not enough meaningful jobs for all prisoners in Unit 2 so many were employed in menial jobs inside the unit. Of 85 men in the unit, 19 were unit workers (22%) and another nine had no employment (11%).

These constraints undermined the incentive system and the prison's ability to encourage positive behaviour within the prisoner group. It is also important to note that these accommodation options were available to men only. There were no such incentives for women [see Chapter 7].

2.4 Emergency preparedness had been enhanced

Emergency preparedness at Roebourne had been strengthened through increased interagency engagement, targeted staff training and more structured exercises. The prison facilitated joint familiarisation and training activities with local police, fire and emergency services, and the Department's Special Operations Group. These activities supported a more coordinated approach to incident response in a remote environment where timely external assistance is critical.

Senior staff capability had also improved through formal incident management training. A group of 12 senior managers and staff completed Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) training, and breathing apparatus training was undertaken by two senior staff to support operational readiness in fire-related events. In parallel, the prison conducted regular emergency management training using a combination of live and desktop exercises, improving routine exposure to emergency roles and procedures.

3 Living conditions had improved but infrastructure was old

Recent installation of air-conditioning in all cells had improved living conditions substantially. High prisoner numbers placed increasing pressure on ageing infrastructure and maintenance needs were constant. Some areas, such as unit bathrooms and kitchens, needed more attention, but hygiene and environmental health generally met standards.

This chapter assesses the performance of Roebourne against the following standards:

Standard 11 – Living conditions

The built environment is clean, functional and culturally appropriate.

Standard 12 – Hygiene, clothing, and bedding

People in custody are provided with adequate clothing, bedding and basic hygiene items to maintain personal hygiene and dignity.

3.1 The installation of air-conditioning had a positive impact

Lack of climate control has been a longstanding problem at Roebourne. We identified it as a concern in our first inspection back in 2002, and we have highlighted the issue and made recommendations in every report since. Roebourne is located in one of the hottest climate zones in Australia and weather conditions during the hot season are often oppressive. Monitoring undertaken during our last inspection showed the temperatures in cells without air-conditioning averaged over 32 degrees throughout the night (OICS, 2022, pp. 33–34). We had earlier observed:

The temperatures we recorded at Roebourne were not simply uncomfortable; they demonstrated a significant threat to prisoner health (OICS, 2015, p. iii).

Positively, after more than 20 years of recommendations by this office, the Department had installed air-conditioning in all cells at Roebourne. This project ran from September 2024 – July 2025 at a cost of around \$16 million.

Feedback from both staff and prisoners was universally positive. Prisoners were pleased with the cooler temperatures in cell, particularly while locked in cell overnight, and the positive impact on their ability to sleep. Staff noted that the demeanour of prisoners was generally much improved and they were easier to manage when they had slept well.

From our perspective, this was a long-awaited development and fundamentally provided more decent and humane living conditions for people in custody at Roebourne.

3.2 Infrastructure was aged and under pressure from high numbers

The prison's infrastructure was aged and was under increasing pressure from a higher prisoner population than it was designed to accommodate. The prison opened in 1984, and parts of the site were no longer fit for purpose and were in poor condition, with transportable buildings used to address ongoing shortfalls. Cells had progressively been adapted to hold more people, with most single cells double-bunked, double cells triple-bunked, and quadruple cells now holding six beds. Additional mattresses on cell floors were common, and we observed up to 11 prisoners in a six-bed cell. At the start of the inspection, Unit 1 housed 107 prisoners against a capacity of 100, Unit 2 was at full capacity, and the women's unit also operated at full capacity.



Photo 3: A typical cell with additional mattress on the floor.

High numbers increased wear and tear across the site and added strain to already ageing systems. The harsh local environment and hard water contributed to persistent plumbing problems. A Facilities Manager position established in April 2025 had been important in driving much-needed maintenance and repair work across the prison. However, the role was funded only until February 2026. This position should be made permanent to sustain maintenance planning and address the ongoing backlog created by ageing infrastructure and overcrowding.

Recommendation 3

Permanently establish the Facilities Manager position.

3.3 Hygiene generally met standards but some areas needed attention

Overall hygiene practices were supported by several core services that operated effectively. The main kitchen was generally well managed and food delivery processes were within safe timeframes, with meals portioned and transported to units in a manner that maintained food safety. The laundry also operated well. Prisoner workers demonstrated sound knowledge of laundering processes, bedding was washed weekly as a mandatory requirement, and procedures existed for items contaminated with biological waste.

However, hygiene standards were not maintained consistently within accommodation units. Communal ablution facilities (toilets and showers) were observed to be unclean and smelly, with rubbish, visible staining, and calcification linked to hard water. Cleaning responsibilities were unclear, and cleaning arrangements were insufficient. Limited staff presence in the units meant unit workers were relied upon to clean with little supervision, feedback or reinforcement of standards.

Unit kitchens also required more regular and thorough cleaning. Ovens, sinks, refrigerators and freezers were dirty or untidy, and there was no evident cleaning schedule to ensure consistency. As with ablutions, the underlying issue was the lack of routine staff oversight and mentorship in units to support prisoners to maintain shared spaces to an acceptable standard.

Recommendation 4

Increase staff presence and oversight of cleaning in the units.



Photo 4: Unit kitchens required more regular and thorough cleaning.



Photos 5 & 6: Unit bathrooms were unclean and untidy, with rubbish, visible staining, and calcification.

4 Daily routine and activities were regularly disrupted

Custodial staffing shortages frequently led to changes in the daily routine and impacted on prisoner activities such as recreation and employment. Processes around meal distribution were not consistent, contributing to prisoner dissatisfaction about food quantity. Social visits were inaccessible for many prisoners who were separated from their families by long distances, and e-visits were not operating effectively.

This chapter assesses the performance of Roebourne against the following standards:

Standard 13 – Contact with family and visits

People in custody can maintain contact with their friends and family and organise regular visits.

Standard 14 – Food and canteen

There is access to a varied and balanced diet and additional items for purchase through a canteen system.

Standard 15 – Purposeful activities

Individuals in custody have access to a range of purposeful activities during the day and at least two hours of recreation in the open air.

Standard 23 – Employment

All people in custody can participate in meaningful work that is fair and non-exploitative and boosts their employability upon release.

4.1 Daily life had become more restrictive for prisoners

Staff shortages meant the prison was making daily decisions about how to prioritise operations and services. Essentially, they were deciding which services needed to be shut down because there were not enough staff, or which services could be shut down to allow other services to run. Staff were redeployed based on these decisions. Prisoners and staff described the practical result as more frequent restrictions, more time confined in cell, and a less predictable routine.

Prisoners complained that they were locked in cell more frequently since air-conditioning had been installed. Roebourne had previously avoided locking prisoners in cell during the day because the extreme heat made this inhumane. But with cells now air-conditioned, Roebourne had adopted practices that were standard in other medium- and maximum-security prisons throughout the state. This included locking prisoners in cell for an hour in the middle of the day to allow staff lunch breaks, and a half-day lockdown once a week to facilitate staff training. Prisoners reported being let out of cell later each morning. The daily routine states that unlock should take place at 7.30 am but

prisoners were consistently kept in cell until 8.00 am. Prisoners also complained about earlier evening lock-ups on some days (as early as 4.00 pm).

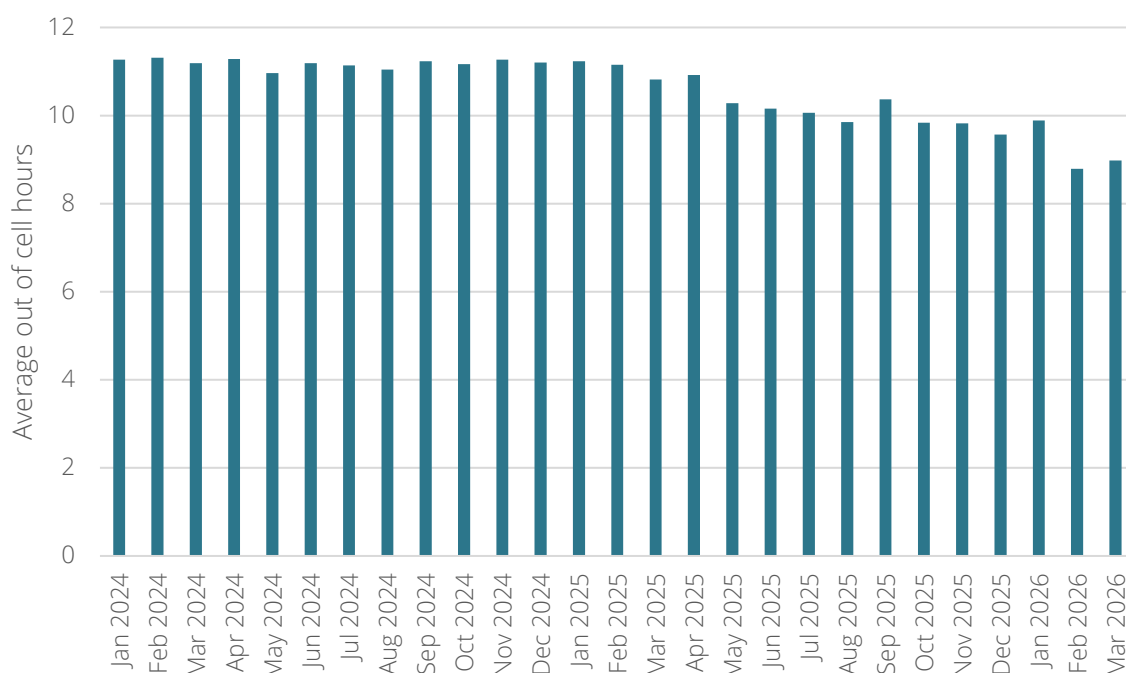


Figure 2: Average out of cell hours, January 2024 – March 2026

The Department's data confirmed that average out of cell hours had decreased since the installation of air-conditioning. The first air-conditioned unit opened at the end of March 2025 and average out of cell hours had been trending downwards since then. Until March 2025, Roebourne's average out of cell hours had consistently been around 11 hours per day, which is very high compared to similar prisons around the state. The more recent trend has Roebourne's out of cell hours between 9–10 hours per day, which aligns with similar prisons.

4.2 Processes for meal distribution were inconsistent

Prisoners reported low satisfaction with the quantity of food provided. In the prisoner survey, 63% of respondents rated food quantity as poor, up from 45% at the previous inspection (an increase of 18%) and similarly above the state average of 46%. During the inspection, prisoners also complained about not receiving enough food and some reported missing out on meals.

Observations indicated that staff supervision of meal distribution was not consistent, and this increased the risk of prisoners missing out. We found levels of supervision were different in some units and at some times of day. In the women's unit and the maximum-security unit, meals were left unsupervised on a table for self-service, increasing risks of stand-over and uneven distribution. During breakfast in all units, prisoners selected packets of cereal freely and some took up to four bags. We raised some of these concerns during the inspection and saw immediate response, with both staff supervision and quantity of food increased.

4.3 Opportunities for organised recreation were rare

Organised recreation had been heavily impacted by custodial officer shortages and the frequent redeployment of recreation officers to cover custodial officer positions. When redeployment occurred, sessions on the oval, in the recreation hall and in the library did not proceed and prisoners were limited to unstructured recreation time. Between January–September 2025, 64% of recreation sessions had been cancelled. One recreation officer reported 38 consecutive days of redeployment earlier in the year, and in the week prior to our inspection had not performed any recreation duties. Prisoner survey results aligned with these observations, with 68% of respondents rating organised sport as poor and 71% reporting no access to the library. Similarly, only 25% of staff survey respondents rated access to organised sport as acceptable.

The outdoor central yard of the prison (known as the quadrangle) provided a good space for recreation, featuring gym equipment, a basketball court, and shaded areas for prisoners to engage in activities that fit their needs. When recreation officers were redeployed, activities were unstructured. Both mainstream units had regular access to the quadrangle area, usually daily, although this was dependent on staffing levels. But access was more limited for the women's unit and maximum-security unit. Employed prisoners complained they missed recreation because sessions clashed with work, and there were limited options after working hours. Access to the oval had been infrequent and usually limited to event days (for example NAIDOC Week events).



Photo 7: The prison quadrangle featured an undercover outdoor gymnasium and a basketball court.

The recreation hall provided an indoor, air-conditioned area for passive recreation. It included pool tables, dart boards, gaming consoles, and the library. However, access to this area was now infrequent.

Women in custody experienced fewer recreation opportunities than men. Activity was commonly restricted to walking in the prison quadrangle or playing pool in the recreation hall. Mixed recreation sessions with men and women were not permitted on security grounds. These operational constraints, combined with the small and transient cohort, reduced the frequency of structured sessions for women.



Photo 8: The recreation hall was a good facility but access was infrequent.

4.4 There was not enough meaningful employment for prisoners

Prisoner employment opportunities within the prison remained limited. At the time of our inspection, 95 prisoners were not working (46% of the total population) and another 44 were employed as unit workers (21%). Most unit work consisted of menial tasks that required little time and effort and could not be considered meaningful employment. This meant only one-third of prisoners were leaving their unit each day to carry out a meaningful job.

In fact, even those with employment were not consistently able to work. Staffing shortages often led to Vocational and Support Officers (VSOs) being redeployed away from prisoner industries, resulting in workplaces being shut down. As a result, the number of prisoners engaged in meaningful work is even lower than recorded.

There were large numbers of unfilled prisoner worker positions across the prison – 69 remained vacant, even though many prisoners expressed a strong desire to work. While some vacancies are understandable – such as those tied to COVID-19 special tasks – others highlight systemic gaps. For example, maintenance employed only four workers out of a possible 12 and gardens had six out of 12. These gaps reflected staffing pressures and instability generated by frequent redeployment of VSOs. This instability undermined the rehabilitative intent of employment and weakened the daily routine that helps keep the prison settled.

Female employment in prison industries at Roebourne had ceased altogether, largely due to the transient nature of the female population and a perceived lack of engagement.

This lack of opportunity created an imbalance compared to male inmates and needs to be addressed to ensure fairness and rehabilitation prospects. Introducing smaller-scale projects, such as organising and managing the prison library, could provide women with meaningful work while also improving access to educational resources. Such initiatives would help bridge the gap and create more equitable opportunities across the prison system.

There was a need to expand prisoner employment and stabilise VSO availability, with more focus on roles that offer skill development rather than repetitive tasks. Without this, many prisoners were missing out on the rehabilitative benefits of employment.

Recommendation 5

Increase employment opportunities and maximise the use of employment positions that already exist for both male and female prisoners.

4.5 Contact with family was valued but difficult to access for many

Family contact was a crucial factor in prisoner wellbeing and rehabilitation. Cultural and community connectedness needs were heightened for a predominantly Aboriginal population. Roebourne's regional location and a prisoner population largely separated from family meant many could not receive in-person visits due to distance and travel cost.

Prisoner survey results reflected this – only 27% of respondents said it was easy to access visits in person (down from 47% in 2022). Telephone access partially mitigated the lack of access to visits, with 89% of respondents stating it was easy to contact family by telephone.

E-visits were intended to be another option to offset the isolation of the prison, but there were multiple barriers to effective operation. Prisoner awareness of the e-visits system was low and processes were poorly understood. Identification and verification requirements for visitors frequently stalled applications. At the time of our inspection, e-visits were operating from a single terminal in the video-link room. Court and official matters took precedence, displacing social e-visits and contributing to a long wait list. There was only one video link officer, working 8.00 am – 4.00 pm, which limited opportunities for social e-visits.

Two new e-visit terminals had been installed in the visits centre in an attempt to increase access. But staff had not been trained to operate the system, or to supervise and monitor e-visit sessions. In any event, low staffing levels meant there were not enough officers to staff the area consistently. This meant that the e-visit terminals in the visits centre were not yet being used.

Ultimately, e-visits were not operating effectively and were available to a small number of prisoners only. For example, in August 2025, only seven social e-visits were recorded. Only 11% of prisoner survey respondents said it was easy to contact family via e-visits.

Recommendation 6

Ensure e-visits are operating effectively.

5 Servicing physical and mental health was challenging

Primary health services had been affected by shortages and turnover of nursing staff. Even more fundamentally, prisoner access to the medical centre had been restricted because of custodial staffing shortages. Limited access to dental services was a concern, and mental health services were undermined by lack of access to a psychiatrist. More positive was the support available from a psychological counsellor and a strong peer support team.

This chapter assesses the performance of Roebourne against the following standards:

Standard 17 – Physical health care

People in custody are treated with respect and have equal access to all health services, including prompt care, clear information, and culturally sensitive practices, supported by a multi-disciplinary approach and strong partnerships.

Standard 18 – Mental health care

People in custody receive thorough mental health care and support.

Standard 20 – Support

All people in custody can access a culturally sensitive support system, including a Prison Support Officer, peer support groups, and Aboriginal Prison Visitors.

5.1 Staff turnover and shortages impacted primary health services

Primary health services had been disrupted by frequent closures of the health centre and instability in key roles. The medical centre was closed 60–70% of the time leading up to the inspection, principally because medical duty officer (MDO) coverage was unavailable or redeployed to escorts and other duties. When an external hospital transfer required MDO attendance, the centre closed by default, further reducing access. These patterns reflected a service that, in practice, was not treated as essential within the daily deployment model.

Turnover and acting arrangements in leadership compounded these pressures. The Clinical Nurse Manager (CNM) position had lacked stability, with acting coverage and periods of absence that affected continuity, supervision and portfolio management.

General practitioner care relied on telehealth twice weekly, and an in-person visit only once a fortnight. Nurses reported operating under time pressure, with preventative health (for example, routine reviews and care-plan updates) deferred when the centre was closed. In turn, prisoners experienced longer waits for review and medication initiation, with associated risks of unmanaged pain or infection.

Despite these constraints, there were notable strengths. The nursing team ran a seven-day service with two nurses plus a CNM on weekdays (one nurse on weekends), and they maintained chronic-disease portfolios for cardiac, asthma and diabetes patients, aiming for three-monthly reviews. Screening practices were in place, with annual checks (including ECGs for those over 35) and blood tests ordered at the GP's discretion. Staff described an effective, supportive team culture, and recent months had seen some improvement in nursing availability.

However, the service remained vulnerable to redeployment. The centre could not operate safely without an MDO, and limited GP presence meant nurses absorbed clinical demand while deferring elements that required medical prescribing or diagnostics. Without stable CNM coverage and guaranteed MDO and GP availability, core functions such as timely triage, consistent medication management, and regular care-plan reviews, were not assured.

5.2 Dental services were especially lacking

Access to dental care had been the most lacking element of health at Roebourne. Routine problems frequently escalated to urgent presentations because dental treatment was not available. Staff reported a steady increase in prisoners arriving with complex dental needs that clinical nurses could not diagnose or treat. Pain and infection were commonly managed with short courses of antibiotics and analgesics in lieu of restorative care.

The regional setting compounded the shortfall, with no public dental service available in Karratha. Community wait times were around 12 months, and prisoners were placed on the same lists as the general public. The nominal referral pathway to the South Hedland dental bus (190 kilometres away) was not feasible because escorts over that distance could not be reliably facilitated. Where a patient's condition deteriorated sufficiently, emergency hospital dental care was used.

Structural constraints within the prison also limited access. Dental care required an MDO to escort and supervise, but MDO availability was inconsistent. When escorts occurred, the health centre often closed, displacing other health services. There was no Department of Justice dental contract, limited budget to procure private services, and uneven access to privately funded care through Aboriginal Corporations. As a result, we were told two to three prisoners each week presented with toothache yet received only analgesia and antibiotics.

Prisoner survey results aligned with these findings – 60% of respondents rated dental care as poor. In practical terms, preventative and restorative dentistry was not available to most prisoners, and the system's reliance on symptomatic relief carried avoidable risks of tooth loss and recurrent infection. We acknowledge the challenges associated with accessing dental services in the region, but this is a fundamental duty of care the Department must address. It is likely that a broader strategy involving other government agencies will be required to achieve this.

Recommendation 7

Ensure dental services are available to prisoners at Roebourne.

5.3 Mental health services were limited by lack of psychiatry

Mental health care had been constrained by the absence of a psychiatrist at Roebourne. There was no on-site provision and not even telehealth coverage. Without psychiatric assessment and prescribing authority, many prisoners with possible mental disorders remained undiagnosed. Symptoms often manifested as behavioural and management problems in the units, which in turn undermined safety for staff and other prisoners.

Medication governance was particularly affected. Prisoners with diagnosed conditions who required changes to dosage or timing could not be reviewed promptly because such adjustments required psychiatric authorisation. In one case, it took more than six weeks to secure a medication change, during which the prisoner remained in distress. These delays were not isolated to a single presentation but reflected systemic absence of specialist oversight.

A Mental Health Nurse was in post and managed about 15 prisoners on the mental health register. However, this caseload likely under-represented need across the broader population given the lack of diagnostic capacity, which constrained identification and treatment planning.

The lack of psychiatry was a statewide issue that locally translated into limited access to specialist assessment, prescribing and review. The cumulative effect was reduced clinical continuity and avoidable distress for prisoners who would have benefited from timely specialist input.

Recommendation 8

Ensure psychiatric services are available to prisoners at Roebourne.

5.4 Peer support services were strong

Peer support provided an important source of assistance for all prisoners, particularly those who were vulnerable or at risk. Previously, Roebourne had not maintained a functioning peer support team because the Prison Support Officer (PSO) position had been vacant for an extended period, but in 2025 the program had been re-established and now operated effectively. The renewed team contributed to a safer environment by checking in on prisoners who needed support at times when staff were occupied and might not immediately recognise emerging concerns.

Effective leadership underpinned this improvement. The PSO had been in post for two years, had reinvigorated the team, and enjoyed strong support from team members. Selection of peer supporters was careful and deliberate. The PSO clarified role requirements, assessed applicants' capacity and willingness to undertake responsibilities, and monitored the wellbeing of team members, encouraging time out when needed.

We considered this one of the best-functioning and well-managed peer support teams in the state. The team's presence helped maintain a calm, supportive atmosphere in units by supplementing staff efforts, offering timely peer contact, and providing an additional pathway for prisoners to raise concerns.

6 Rehabilitative services were impacted by short staffing

Access to services that aid rehabilitation and reduce reoffending – such as education, offender programs, and pre- and post-release support – had decreased because of custodial staff shortages. The air-conditioning installation project and the associated drop in the prison population had reduced the pool of prisoners eligible for these services, as had the significant increase in the remand population. The prison lacked resources to support the increased population of remand prisoners.

This chapter assesses the performance of Roebourne against the following standards:

Standard 6 – Support for people on remand

Custodial facilities minimise the stress for people entering custody on remand, offer a regime that reflects their unconvicted status, and assists them to meet their bail conditions and be promptly released from custody.

Standard 22 – Programs and education

All people in custody are assessed to identify their risks and needs, and receive evidence-based programs, education and life skills training tailored to their requirements.

Standard 24 – Preparation for release

All people in custody are well-prepared for release and provided essential support for their departure and successful reintegration into the community.

6.1 Resources and services for remand prisoners were lacking

There had been significant growth in the remand population since our previous inspection. In 2022, there were 59 remand prisoners, making up 34% of the prison population. In 2025, this had more than doubled, with 135 remand prisoners making up 66% of the prison population. This created additional pressure in the prison, in terms of higher turnover, a less settled population, and providing for the specific needs of remand prisoners.

Support for remandees had been a clear gap in service provision. Staff advised that assistance for this cohort was neither the responsibility of the Transitional Manager nor covered by the contracted re-entry service, leaving remandees outside established pathways to pre-release support. Remand prisoners had fewer opportunities than sentenced prisoners across core domains: they were not eligible for departmental offender programs, were the lowest priority for education and training, could not commence longer courses, and were ineligible for work camp placement.

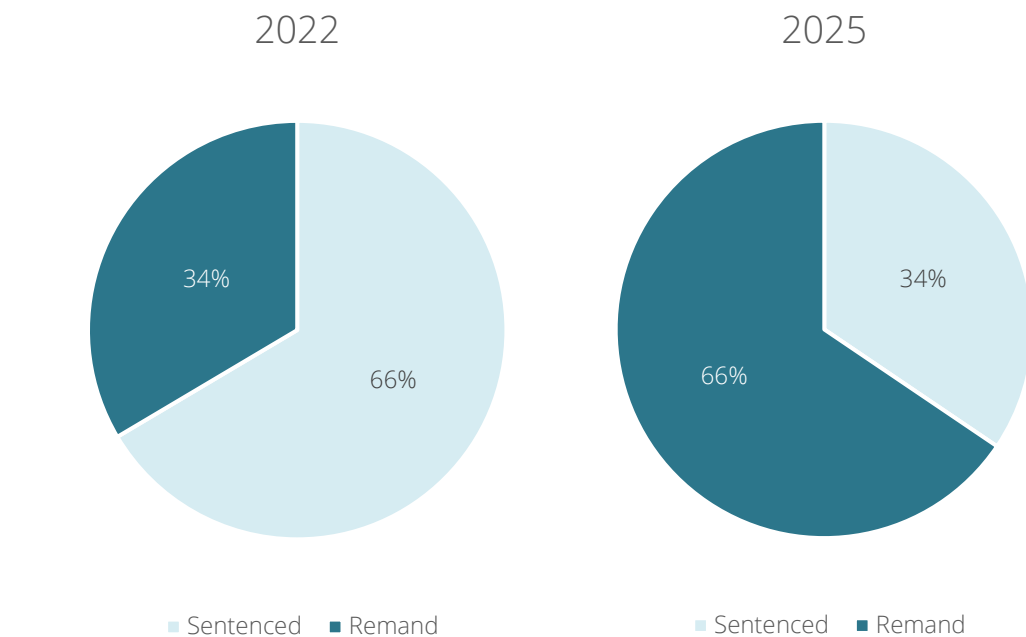


Figure 3: Proportion of remand and sentenced prisoners in 2022 and 2025

Access to legal information was limited and remained unchanged since our previous inspection (OICS, 2022, pp. 12–14). A computer with a legal database existed but was kept in a room adjacent to the recreation hall. Prisoners seldom used it, partly due to low awareness and confidence, and because frequent redeployments meant the recreation hall and library were often closed. The combined effect was that remandees were less able to engage with legal processes or prepare for progression through the system. A pragmatic improvement would have been a short legal workshop embedded in early days activity (for example alongside work health and safety inductions) to ensure consistent, early access to basic legal knowledge and resources.

Recommendation 9

Provide adequate resources to support remand prisoners.

6.2 Good initiatives in education had been restricted by staff shortages

Education services had been significantly disrupted by custodial staff shortages, which led to frequent closures of the education centre. By the start of November 2025, the centre had been closed for 58% of the year.

There was a small education team – one Campus Manager, two Prisoner Education Coordinators (PECs), one Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW), and one Education Clerk. The team had been impacted by staff turnover and instability – one of the PEC positions was vacant and the AEW had been seconded to another position. Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified education staff had proven challenging because of the regional location, competitive employment market, and low housing availability. This was reflected at training organisations in the community, including North

Regional TAFE, which was a major training provider for the prison. This had contributed to reduced delivery of education and training within the prison.

Despite these constraints, the education team maintained a high level of throughput. From 1 January to 30 September 2025, there were 494 prisoners enrolled in 990 units with 686 unit completions, while in 2024 there were 674 prisoners enrolled in 850 units with 763 completions. The education team attempted to minimise disruption through modified delivery and smaller class sizes, and by prioritising short, discrete units that could be completed quickly. During an online interview with education staff at Roebourne, we heard about the preference for delivery of courses that were short, clear and specifically targeted. This response played a constructive role in ensuring the continuity of education services.

They also acknowledged that many of the unit completions over this period were achieved via recognition of prior learning, which essentially meant identifying skills that prisoners already possessed and using these to meet unit requirements. These adjustments were pragmatic given the frequent closures caused by custodial staffing shortages and low access to prisoners during the air-conditioning project. But it was not the desired model of service delivery, and the education team were restoring more regular classroom teaching as prison operations and the prisoner population stabilised.

Delivering education to women prisoners was particularly challenging because of the high turnover in the population, with most women spending only short periods at Roebourne. To address this, the education team delivered courses in blocks over several consecutive days rather than once a week, recognising that weekly sessions were unlikely to achieve meaningful outcomes before women were released or transferred. However, this approach meant some women entered and left custody without receiving any education at all, and access to education was highly vulnerable to staff shortages on the days when sessions were scheduled.

Despite the challenges facing education, there had been some particularly positive recent initiatives. The radio studio that had existed in the prison for a few years (but never been used) was now operational. Education staff had identified training appropriate for the radio equipment in the prison, had undertaken this training themselves, and then delivered training to prisoners. Following that, the education centre had successfully launched a collaborative radio segment with Ngaarda Media, who run a local radio station. Several episodes had now aired, hosted by prisoners and broadcast from inside the prison.

Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation had donated a barista machine to the prison, allowing the education centre to deliver barista training. The prison had constructed a coffee cart, which could be run by prisoners who had completed barista training. These initiatives provided meaningful, skills-based learning and visible achievements for participants.

Similarly, the Employment Coordinator had spearheaded a partnership with labour hire and recruitment company, Category 5, to run a rail infrastructure program in the prison. The program had been named Bulujari Guma, meaning 'forward together' in Ngarluma language. Rio Tinto had donated and laid a section of railway track inside the prison, allowing prisoners to gain practical, hands-on experience. All 10 participants in the first program graduated successfully with a Certificate

II in Rail Infrastructure. These skills are in high demand within the resources sector in the region and provide great employment opportunities for prisoners after release.



Photo 9: A section of railway track laid in the prison as part of the Bulujari Guma rail infrastructure program.

We remained concerned that specific adult basic education (ABE) courses were not being run. We acknowledge the education centre instead focused on incorporating elements of ABE into more popular vocational training courses that attracted prisoners to education. ABE requires a substantial number of guided learning hours to achieve unit completions, and this is difficult in the context of low staffing and high turnover within the prisoner population.

We suggest that, for some prisoners, gains in literacy and numeracy may occur without achieving unit completions, and this should still be recognised. Inconsistent ABE delivery, driven by staffing shortfalls and prisoner churn, disrupted a critical learning pathway for those most in need. This undermined rehabilitation prospects reliant on baseline literacy and numeracy. We acknowledge that this reflects the broader systemic vulnerabilities around resourcing and crowding rather than a reluctance to deliver these courses.

Recommendation 10

Ensure adult basic education is prioritised and adequately resourced.

6.3 Engagement with pre-release support and services had decreased

Engagement with pre-release and re-entry services at Roebourne had fallen markedly. The re-entry services provider, Pilbara Community Services, reported working with fewer than 10 prisoners, down from around 90 before the air-conditioning project. This decline was linked to several factors happening at once, including custodial staffing shortages, fewer sentenced prisoners on site, a higher number of remand prisoners who were not eligible for the service, and the absence of a permanent, full-time Transitional Manager.

Service delivery was also frequently disrupted. Workshops that once ran weekly were often postponed or reduced, and access to the education area was sometimes limited to small numbers. Despite this, the provider remained on site and continued to offer a range of non-clinical programs, including parenting, alcohol and other drug education, family and domestic violence, anger management, mental wellbeing, parole information and re-entry life skills. Women prisoners had recently completed a parenting course, and another program was planned for the following year, but staffing constraints continued to limit reach and consistency.

7 Women prisoners were a disadvantaged minority

Small numbers and high turnover made it challenging to deliver meaningful services to women prisoners at Roebourne. The lack of consistent staff dedicated to the women meant that activities were limited, and the women's unit was in poor condition.

There is no standard relating specifically to women prisoners. Our expectations for the treatment of women prisoners are included throughout our standards. But for a regional prison like Roebourne, where women are a distinct minority cohort of the prison population, it is worthwhile evaluating their management separately.

7.1 Women had limited access to services and activities

Women at Roebourne were a disadvantaged minority and had limited access to core services and activities. The women's unit had 14 beds only, although like the men's units, it often operated beyond capacity with mattresses on cell floors. Women typically made up about 6–7% of the total prison population. In general, they were predominantly Aboriginal women, and most were on remand rather than sentenced. During our inspection, all of the women were Aboriginal and 13 of 14 were on remand. The high remand rate created high turnover and constant fluctuation in numbers, which complicated consistent delivery of programs and activity.

The Women's Support Officer (WSO) position played a key role in coordinating activities and services for the women. In practice, this position was also vital in identifying and advocating for services for the women and motivating and encouraging participation by the women. Although there was a substantive WSO, the position holder had been acting in other positions for over 12 months, leaving little continuity to plan and run activities.

Operationally, when staffing was low the women's unit was often the easiest area to lock down. We also heard that officers were reluctant to leave a non-custodial WSO alone in the unit, and when a custodial officer was not available, women's time out of cell and activities were curtailed. Women described feeling confined to the unit and struggling to communicate with staff other than by calling out at the wing grille.

Living conditions in the women's unit further constrained wellbeing and constructive use of time. During our visit, we observed unclean showers and toilet cubicles, unemptied sanitary bins in communal areas and generally unkempt cells. Women reported mice in the oven and a build-up of grime around the stove. Furniture that previously supported communal meals and activities (tables and chairs) had been replaced by a large stainless-steel table used for laundry folding, reducing the amenity of the space. Women held various cleaning jobs in the unit, but the state of the unit indicated limited monitoring and inconsistent cell inspections.

Women's access to recreation mirrored these constraints. Women complained of rare and brief recreation opportunities. Mixed-gender recreation occurred under supervision around significant cultural or sporting events but was not regularly available.

Access to offender programs was particularly constrained. Although a regular Pathways (alcohol and other drug) program operated at the prison, it was offered to men only. Women who were eligible

for treatment programs were required to transfer to another facility, often far from country and family, to complete those programs. Staff observed that transfers disrupted women's engagement with programs and increased worry about dependants, especially children, remaining in community. These factors undermined the rehabilitative intent of programming for women who otherwise met the criteria to participate.

Overall, women missed out on regular employment, consistent recreation and access to offender programs. Also, they spent much of their time in a small, self-contained unit with few constructive options. Where participation was possible, it tended to be ad hoc and short-lived. The women's experience at Roebourne was poor and required significant improvement. A dedicated and stable WSO presence to focus attention specifically on services for the women could provide impetus for this improvement.

In our previous inspection report, we discussed at length the disadvantage faced by women at Roebourne, and the need to address this with a full-service facility. This could either be a new unit within the prison or a new standalone facility on adjacent land. We made a recommendation to '[p]lan for a more suitable facility for incarcerated women in the Pilbara'. The Department did not support this recommendation, stating that it was 'not within the current scope of the Department's Long-Term Custodial Infrastructure Plan' (OICS, 2022, pp. 58–61, 72).

From our perspective, the need for more suitable infrastructure remains unchanged. More staffing and resources would facilitate better access to services and improve outcomes for women at Roebourne. But to properly address the disadvantage they face as a minority population in a predominantly male prison, women need facilities of their own.

Recommendation 11

Plan for a more suitable facility for incarcerated women in the Pilbara.

Recommendation 12

Increase resources, support and access to services for women prisoners.

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Appendix B Acronyms

Term	Expansion of Abbreviation
ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEW	Aboriginal Education Worker
CNM	Clinical Nurse Manager
GROH	Government Regional Officer Housing
KJ	Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Aboriginal Corporation
MDO	Medical Duty Officer
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services
PEC	Prisoner Education Coordinator
PSO	Prison Support Officer
SLA	Staffing Level Agreement
STO	Satellite Training Officer
VSO	Vocational and Support Officer
WSO	Women's Support Officer



Response to the Announced Inspection:

2025 Inspection of Roebourne
Regional Prison

May 2026

Response Overview

On 25 September 2025, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the commencement of an inspection into Roebourne Regional Prison (Roebourne).

To assist with the inspection, the Department of Justice (the Department) provided a range of documentation as well as access to systems, custodial facilities, staff, and prisoners.

On 22 April 2026, the Department received the draft report which raised 12 recommendations for review and comment.

Of the 12 recommendations:

- Six were supported in principle;
- Three were supported as current practice/project;
- One was noted;
- One was supported; and
- One was not supported.

Detailed responses to the recommendations can be found below.

Response to Recommendations

1 Implement strategies to address the key factors contributing to custodial staffing shortages at Roebourne.

Level of Acceptance:	Supported in Principle
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The Department acknowledges there are various factors that contribute to staff shortages at Roebourne, primarily the availability of housing, and absences due to personal leave and workers' compensation.

Recent changes to Government Regional Officers Housing (GROH) eligibility requirements require staff to be physically based at the regional location before housing can be allocated. As most staff are dependent on housing being available in order for them to relocate to Karratha, this creates a further barrier which requires them to already be residing in the region.

To support addressing this issue, the Department provides five transit share-houses in Karratha that are fully furnished and rent-free, however these are only available to staff willing to enter into shared accommodation arrangements with other staff and therefore may not be suitable for those wishing to relocate with their families. In addition, spaces within the share-houses may not always be available as the accommodation is shared by prisons, Adult Community Corrections, and Youth Justice Services staff.

Noting the above, the Department of Housing Works is actively working to buy, build or lease additional properties in Karratha, which has been identified as a priority location to secure further accommodation for use by Government officers.

In regard to personal leave and workers' compensation, a review into the Department's workers' compensation and injury management practices was completed by an external consultant in late-2025 with the Department now commencing a number of actions stemming from this review.

This includes the development and implementation of a more effective resource model and Workers' Compensation Team structure, development of a budget submission to seek the necessary funding to establish this model, and the scoping, planning and development of a Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Framework to better support individual sites in managing staff on workers' compensation.

2 Increase resources for the security team.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Additional security team resourcing has been requested in the revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Roebourne, noting this is subject to approval.

Whilst there is currently only one Senior Officer Security position, this is occupied by two officers on a six-monthly rolling basis, with each six-month period overlapping for three months allowing for knowledge and information sharing prior to new officers commencing against each six-monthly period.

3 Permanently establish the Facilities Manager position.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Since the inspection, the Facilities Manager position has been permanently established and funded.

4 Increase staff presence and oversight of cleaning in the units.

Level of Acceptance: Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

In the revised SLA for Roebourne, a VSO Cleaning Instructor has been requested and is pending approval.

In addition, prisoner duty sheets have been updated to provide clear guidelines and expectations surrounding cleanliness and hygiene standards within units, and a Superintendent Instruction has been issued reinforcing the cleaning requirements.

Pending the establishment of a VSO Cleaning Instructor, interim arrangements are in place for the Facilities Manager position to provide oversight and guidance to prisoners with cleaning duties.

5 Increase employment opportunities and maximise the use of employment positions that already exist for both male and female prisoners.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Roebourne has reviewed employment opportunities for prisoners and has identified the possibility for employment positions to be increased in the education centre.

Corrective Services continues to actively advertise and undertake recruitment processes to remedy workforce shortfalls, in addition to addressing and identifying core staffing requirements as part of the Service Level Agreement.

6 Ensure e-visits are operating effectively.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Since the inspection, staff have been trained to operate the e-visits terminals which are now in use. Operating instructions and simplified guidance for prisoners have also been developed to encourage the use of these facilities.

Since these actions have been implemented, there has been an uptake in e-visits use at Roebourne.

7 Ensure dental services are available to prisoners at Roebourne.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Dental care to the custodial population statewide continues to be provided by Dental Health Services (DHS), North Metropolitan Health Service.

Ongoing liaison between DHS and Justice Health and Wellbeing Services is occurring to advocate for increased service provision to the custodial estate.

8 Ensure psychiatric services are available to prisoners at Roebourne.

Level of Acceptance:	Supported in Principle
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services

Response:

While the Department makes every effort to improve the custodial population's access to psychiatric care, psychiatric resourcing is limited statewide, both within the public and private health systems. Rolling recruitment processes for psychiatric positions continues to be undertaken.

In addition, in-reach psychiatry is provided through the State Forensic Mental Health Service (SFMHS), noting this is subject to the availability of Psychiatrists.

While psychiatric services are often limited, mental health support at Roebourne continues to be provided by the Mental Health Nurse, who is able to access the Psychiatric Services Online Information System (PSOLIS), which can be used to identify any previous psychiatric treatments a prisoner may have received in order to develop an appropriate care plan whilst they are in custody. Where there are serious concerns surrounding a prisoner's psychiatric wellbeing, Form 1As are completed and referred to the SFMHS for assessment.

9 Provide resources to support remand prisoners.

Level of Acceptance:	Not Supported
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Remand prisoners currently have access to the majority of supports and services available to sentenced prisoners. Some services and opportunities however, such as criminogenic programs and transitional services, are not available to remand prisoners due to uncertainties surrounding their length of time in custody until sentencing and/or release.

The legal library is accessible to remand prisoners. Information pertaining to its availability is provided to prisoners via the prisoner newsletter. The Peer Support Team are also available should remand prisoners require additional support to access the library. However, it is acknowledged there are barriers impacting its use, including the inability for many prisoners to understand and operate the legal library computer and the availability of staffing to provide assistance in this respect.

Notwithstanding the above, Roebourne makes additional efforts to provide remand prisoners with increased legal supports through expanded in-reach services facilitated by the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS). These are organised on an ad-hoc basis and are subject to the availability of ALS staff.

10 Ensure adult basic education is prioritised and adequately resourced.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is delivered as standard practice at Roebourne and is considered a core component of education delivery and learner development at all facilities across the custodial estate.

The primary issue impacting the consistent delivery of education is the availability of custodial staffing which the Department is taking active efforts to address.

Prisoners at Roebourne are not discouraged from completing ABE in favour of other education options, such as vocational training, as ABE complements their readiness for participation in future vocational pathways and in the workforce.

All education positions at Roebourne are currently stable with the Campus Manager, Aboriginal Education Worker and Prison Education Coordinator positions substantively filled, and the Education Clerk position being substantively filled following a recent recruitment process.

11 Plan for a more suitable facility for incarcerated women in Pilbara.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corporate Services
Responsible Directorate: Major Infrastructure Projects

Response:

The Department is progressing a review of possible custodial sites for expansion and is intended to include Roebourne Regional Prison.

This work will identify the highest priority areas for expansion within the broader custodial estate.

12 Increase resources, support and access to services for women prisoners.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Recruitment to the Women's Support Officer (WSO) position is being actioned as a priority. It is anticipated the position will be filled by September 2026.

Once established, the WSO will assist to advocate for female prisoners, enhance service delivery and ensure consistency of reforms across the women's estate in regional prisons, including but not limited to.

- Managing the prison to ensure the care, wellbeing and development needs of female prisoners are met; and

- Managing the delivery and encouraging prisoner participation in programs aimed at preventing re-offending.

Whilst it is acknowledged there is no program availability for female prisoners at Roebourne, this is due to the transient nature and low numbers of the female cohort. This does not preclude female prisoners' participation in programs as they are able to be transferred to other facilities where there is program availability if they choose.

Female prisoners have the same level of access to recreation as male prisoners do, including separate access to the quadrangle and oval. Roebourne is also exploring opportunities for further mixed-recreation events where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Appendix D Inspection Details

Previous inspection		
13–17 March 2022		
Activity since previous inspection		
Liaison visits	10 visits	
Independent Visitor visits	8 visits	
Surveys		
Prisoner survey	30 September – 2 October 2025	63 responses (34%)
Staff survey (online)	24 September– 15 October 2025	40 responses (33%)
Inspection team		
Inspector	Eamon Ryan	
Deputy Inspector	Jane Higgins	
Principal Inspections and Research Officer	Lauren Netto	
Inspections and Research Officer	Kieran Artelaris	
Inspections and Research Officer (Department of Justice secondee)	John Shenton	
Detention Services Inspection Unit, Queensland Ombudsman	Helen Gabriel	
Environmental Health Directorate, Department of Health	Shayna Burton	
Student intern	Alannah Yuen	

Key dates	
Inspection announced	25 September 2025
Start of on-site inspection	24 November 2025
Completion of on-site inspection	28 November 2025
Presentation of preliminary findings	28 November 2025
Draft report sent to Department of Justice	22 April 2026

Draft response received from Department of Justice	12 June 2026
Declaration of prepared report	23 June 2026



*Inspection of prisons, court
custody centres, prescribed lock-
ups, youth detention centres, and
review of custodial services in
Western Australia*

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