

2024 INSPECTION OF BANDYUP WOMEN'S PRISON

OVERARCHING STRATEGY FOR WOMEN IN PRISONS BEING LINKED TO BANDYUP'S OPERATIONAL PLANNING.

In October 2022 the Department of Justice approved a new framework document titled *'Better Futures - Empowering Women: Changing Lives'* (*Better Futures*) (DoJ, 2022). The introduction to *Better Futures* states the objective of the framework is *'... to support women in Western Australian prisons and build(s) on our commitment to provide gender specific, culturally appropriate and trauma informed services, to achieve better outcomes for women in custody and improve their opportunities for success on release'*.

The strategy expands this objective by outlining a *'... commitment towards a future where all women, regardless of their background or circumstances, are empowered to nurture their strengths and have agency over their future'*.

During the inspection we met with the Bandyup senior management team, led by an experienced Superintendent, who were committed to delivering on the objectives of *Better Futures*. This is supported by the Bandyup Business Plan for 2023-2025, which outlines several focus areas that are complimentary to the *Better Futures* objectives.

We have stated on many occasions the importance of having detailed operational or business plans that are linked to a broad organisational strategic plan. It was very positive, therefore, to see evidence of this in the connection between *Better Futures* and Bandyup's local operational plans. This allows staff across the prison to see the direction that has been set and focus their daily efforts towards meeting those objectives. Success and improvement will require continued support and resourcing and, most importantly, buy-in from all staff.

At a broader system level, we have been briefed by the Commissioner on his priority to develop a Corrective Services Strategic Plan for 2025-2030. This important initiative should provide an overarching framework that allows all prisons to develop strategically focussed local operational business plans along similar lines to what we saw at Bandyup.

Since our last inspection in 2021, there have been some major developments at Bandyup. The most noteworthy of which has been the opening of the Bindi Bindi mental health unit, and the successful implementation of Bandyup becoming the first smoke free prison in Western Australia.

Both initiatives have not been without their challenges, with initial success tempered by the realities of day-to-day operation. In Bindi Bindi the most significant challenges have been the recruitment and retention of specialist clinical staff and maintaining a cohort of specially trained custodial staff for daily operations. Also, despite initial enthusiasm for a smoke free prison among the women and staff, sustaining this through implementation proved challenging. Importantly, the lessons from this pilot have been used in the implementation of a smoke free environment across all women's prisons in early 2024.

The women's estate is facing similar system-wide problems that we regularly see in men's prisons. Record population growth over the past year, most notably in the number of Aboriginal women held on remand, and significant workforce challenges, particularly in recruiting and retaining specialist clinical staff and custodial staff. Our report details many of the impacts that these have had on services and supports for the women at Bandyup, with gaps in mental health services the most acute of these. Despite this, we have seen improvements in many aspects of health care delivery, supports for expectant mothers and those with newborn babies, and in transition and rehabilitation services.

Publication delayed by the Department's response

We sent a first draft of this report to the Department for comment on 5 September 2024. The response from the Department was originally due on 11 October 2024, but this was extended to 25 October 2024. We finally received a detailed response from the Department on 26 November 2024.

There is a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and my Office which sets out Agreed operating parameters, including timeframes for various processes such as responses to draft reports. It is not a legally binding document but establishes what we both agree are reasonable timeframes. The agreed timeframe for the Department to respond to draft reports is five weeks, but the Department had the draft report for nearly 12 weeks.

I had intended taking the unusual step of proceeding to publish this report without the Department's response, but we received their response just in time for it to be included in The final printed version.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have three Independent Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend Bandyup on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the women to raise issues and feedback that information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of their work and thank them for the contribution they have made to our ongoing monitoring of Bandyup.

We are grateful for the support and cooperation received throughout the review from the Superintendent and staff at Bandyup and from key personnel in the Department. The women who took the time to speak with us also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

Finally, I acknowledge and thank members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I acknowledge and thank Cliff Holdom for his work in planning this inspection and initial drafting of this report, and also Natalie Gibson for her work as principal editor of the final report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

26 November 2024