

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Director of Corporate Services

Council: 21 December 2011

Subject: Representation on HMP Low Moss - Visiting Committee

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The Council is asked to note the current position regarding representation on the HMP Low Moss Visiting Committee and consider the nomination of a layperson to serve on the Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1** In August 2010, the Scottish Prison Service advised of the statutory requirement for a Visiting Committee to be formed at the new prison being built near Bishopbriggs – HMS Low Moss, and consulted with the relevant local authorities on the proposed Visiting Committee representation from each Council. The proposed Visiting Committee membership was based on a proportionate representation from each Council based on the projected prisoner population demographic.
- 2.2** On 26 October 2011, the Council agreed that that Councillor George Black be one of the two elected members to serve on the HMP Low Moss - Visiting Committee with the other member (Administration - SNP) to be advised in due course. It has now been confirmed that Councillor Jim Brown will be the other elected member to serve on the Prison Visiting Committee.
- 2.3** At the same meeting, the Council also agreed that in order to fill the vacancies of two non-elected members (laypersons) to serve on the Visiting Committee, officers should advertise in the local press to attract applications from members of the public who are interested in this voluntary work and report back to Council with recommendations.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The Scottish Prison Service has requested details of the Council's nominees by no later than mid December 2011 as induction training will commence in January 2012.
- 3.2** Following the advertisement in the local press three requests for further information were received and application packs were issued with a closing date of 1 December 2011. One completed application was received.

- 3.3** In accordance with the recommendations of the Association of Visiting Committees for Scottish Penal Establishments, the applicant was invited to attend an interview on 8 December with an officer of the Council and a lay-member from an established Visiting Committee.
- 3.4** Following the interview, it is recommended that Lisa Hamilton, [REDACTED] be nominated to represent West Dunbartonshire Council as a layperson on the HMP Low Moss – Visiting Committee, subject to a satisfactory report from Disclosure Scotland and references being received.
- 3.5** Members are asked to note that as there was only one applicant, West Dunbartonshire Council is unable to fill both vacancies for lay-members on the Visiting Committee by the deadline of mid-December 2011.
- 3.6** However, the Scottish Government has just announced that Prison Visiting Committees will be replaced by an independent prisoner advocacy service which will be delivered by a consortium of third sector organisations across the whole prison estate. It is likely that this change will take place in late 2012. Therefore, any appointment made to the Low Moss Prison Visiting Committee will only be for a short period of time. The applicant has been informed of this and is still willing to proceed with training, if appointed.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** There are no implications for employees of the Council.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The representatives nominated to serve on this outside body will be entitled to claim reasonable expenses incurred when attending meetings from the Secretary of State. Therefore there are no financial implications for this Council.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There are no risks arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** The issues raised within this report will not have an adverse impact on any equality group.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1** The role of the Visiting Committee is to ensure that the conditions within the prison contribute to a safe, humane and decent environment in which prisoners' rights are respected and where they are provided with opportunities to prepare for release in ways likely to reduce re-offending. Therefore the role of the Visiting Committee fits well with the Council's strategic priorities as any reduction in re-offending should result in fewer crimes and safer streets.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** The Council is asked:-

- (a) to note that Councillors George Black and Jim Brown have been nominated to serve on the HMP Low Moss – Visiting Committee and that their details have been passed to the Scottish Prison Service;
- (b) to recommend that Lisa Hamilton be nominated to serve as a non-elected member on the HMP Low Moss – Visiting Committee, subject to a satisfactory report from Disclosure Scotland and references being received; and
- (c) to note that there is one vacancy for a non-elected person from West Dunbartonshire to serve on the HMP Low Moss – Visiting Committee; and
- (d) that, given the recent announcement by the Scottish Government on the future of Prison Visiting Committees, officers should take no further action to recruit an additional layperson to serve on the Visiting Committee.

David Amos
Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services
Date: 8 December 2011

Person to Contact: George Hawthorn, Section Head – Democratic Services, Legal, Democratic and Regulatory Services, Council Offices, Dumbarton, G82 3PU Tel: 01389 737204
Email: george.hawthorn@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices: None

Background Papers: letter received from James Chisholm, Scottish Prison Service dated 21 September 2011

Wards Affected: None affected