

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	6 October, 2010
DIRECTOR	Director of Corporate Governance
TITLE OF REPORT	Aberdeen Prison Visiting Committee – Appointment of Replacement Member
REPORT NUMBER	CG/10/171

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report intimates the need to find a replacement for Karen Shirron, one of our appointees on Aberdeen Prison Visiting Committee. Ms. Shirron is standing down from the Committee because of pressure of work, and so a new appointment is now required.

Previous experience suggests that Community Councils and the Civic Forum will not yield many expressions of interest here, reflecting perhaps the likelihood that many people would find entering a prison to be a daunting prospect.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Council make an appointment to Aberdeen Prison Visiting Committee.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The value judgements underpinning the existence of Visiting Committees are outlined in Section 6.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

6. REPORT

- (a) Many elected members will be familiar with the role of Prison Visiting Committees which, very broadly, act on behalf of the First Minister as independent observers concentrating on the conditions in prisons and, in particular, the treatment of prisoners.
- (b) Some form of independent oversight of prisons in Scotland has existed for well over a century. The modern context of the Visiting Committee is a sophisticated one which assumes harmony between the Committee and the Governor but,

ultimately, provides for the possibility that the Committee might not be satisfied by remedial action taken by the Governor in response to its concerns, and for the referral of difficulties to the First Minister.

- (c) Ideally, the Governor welcomes the involvement and participation of the Visiting Committee in the strategic planning process but, ultimately, the Committee has no veto on value judgements reached in the course of that process. However, the absence of ultimate managerial responsibility does not entail lack of real influence.
- (d) Every member of a Visiting Committee has the right to enter the establishment at any time, and to have access to every part of it and to every prisoner. This right must of course be exercised with common sense, and with due regard to the routines of the establishment. A visiting rota is arranged, with a minimum of two members visiting every fortnight. These rota visits are at the heart of the Committee's moral and legal purpose.
- (e) The Aberdeen Committee is supported by the City Council. The statutory rules for Aberdeen stipulate that we need to appoint four representatives (whereas for the Peterhead Committee we are obliged to appoint only three). All four Aberdeen appointments can be external members but at the very least (in any mixture of external members and Councillors) external members must not be outnumbered. Accordingly, with the other three current appointees being Councillors Leslie and Kiddie and former Councillor Steve Delaney, the new appointment must be an external person.
- (f) Although some broad civic experience is desirable, and some knowledge of the justice system preferable, any new appointment with commitment to the role is eminently suitable, and the Scottish Prison Service and the Association of Visiting Committees provide a wide range of training opportunities for new members.

7. AUTHORISED SIGNATURE

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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used as a point of departure for writing this report.