

REVIEW OF THE PARKVILLE YOUTH JUSTICE PRECINCT (STAGE ONE)

Executive Summary

Background

On 12 to 14 November 2016, a series of incidents occurred at the Melbourne Youth Justice Centre (which is part of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct [the Precinct]) during which a number of detainees caused significant damage to the four accommodation units and Programs Centre.

The Review

The Department of Health and Human Services (the department) engaged independent consultant Neil Comrie AO APM (the Reviewer) to report to the department on these incidents and on any specific or safety issues arising from the construction and design of the Precinct, including its grounds, that impede the proper supervision of young people and/or provide a risk to staff and young people, and whether the Precinct's buildings comply with relevant standards for the design and construction of custodial facilities. In considering these issues, the Reviewer was required to provide advice on the overall adequacy of the Precinct for its intended purpose.

The Parkville Youth Justice Precinct

There is a recorded history of youth justice services operating at or near the current Parkville site since the 1890's. The Precinct has evolved since this time with the periodic addition of new buildings and alterations to existing buildings. The current residential units were constructed in the early 1990's and the Remand Unit was built in 2005. In 2011 a significant investment was made in the Precinct with the enhancement of perimeter security surrounding all of the custodial facilities. While this perimeter security has proven to be an effective barrier to escape and unlawful entry to/from the Precinct, there have been ongoing problems with the security of buildings within this perimeter.

These security problems and other issues relating to the general suitability of the Precinct have been the subject of a number of previous review reports that have highlighted key issues relating to:

- the capability and quality of Secure Services' workforce
- the overall operating model and the safe and secure operation of the facilities
- infrastructure weaknesses.

Following these previous reports, substantial funding has been committed to improve the security and utility of the Precinct. However, this previous investment in the Precinct has not been able to address the inherent fundamental design and construction weaknesses in the accommodation units that were initially built for residential purposes and not for high security containment. These fundamental flaws have become more exposed and evident in recent years and are now being exploited by a cohort of young violent offenders who are intent on breaking through insecure barriers and causing purposeless, wanton criminal damage to the Precinct facilities.

As a consequence of the incidents of 12 to 14 November 2016, where extensive damage was caused to the Precinct, rendering all of the residential units at the Melbourne Youth Justice Centre uninhabitable, there are major works being undertaken to reinstate, strengthen and fortify these units. Nevertheless, the Reviewer has concluded that these works can only be an interim response to a situation that requires a more extensive and holistic long-term solution.



Figure 1 and 2: Damage to the ceiling



Figure 3 and 4: Damage to a residential unit



Figure 5: Damage to the Programs Centre Figure 6: New steel vent covers

Contextual Issues

Recently, the issue of violent youth crime has been an issue of ongoing attention in the media and the subject of considerable public debate with regard to community safety. This social problem, especially serious violent crime by young persons with suspected community or so-called “gang” affiliations, presents a range of difficulties and challenges not previously dealt with on the same scale in Victoria and has required a range of new and innovative responses from government and the criminal justice sector.

Responses by the Government and criminal justice system to this emergent social problem have resulted in significant increases in the numbers of young offenders involved in serious violent crime entering the youth justice system. The numbers of these young offenders on remand has also increased exponentially whereby the ratio of those on remand to those undergoing sentences presents a new range of challenges in custodial management for youth justice services on a day to day basis.

An additional layer of complexity regarding the profile of young people entering the youth justice system is that the Youth Parole Board has consistently voiced concerns regarding the over representation of young people with mental health, trauma and intellectual disabilities in custody. Of further concern is the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island, Maori and Pacific Island and South Sudanese young people in youth justice services.

It is also important to acknowledge that the physical stature of a significant number of young male violent offenders entering the youth justice system has changed markedly in recent years. It is not unusual today for young male offenders to be in excess of 100 kilograms in weight and 190 centimetres in height. Some of these offenders are very conscious of the fact that they can use their physical stature to intimidate staff and other clients and do so on a regular basis.

A further recent challenge that has emerged for youth justice services is the management of detainees placed in custody for terrorism related offences. These young persons need to be very carefully accommodated to not only ensure their own safety but to ensure they do not radicalise other impressionable clients.

These young people often present major challenges for youth justice staff who are tasked with their daily management in a custodial environment. The issue of the capability of staff to deal with these challenges is one that must be addressed along with new and improved infrastructure and a modern operating model. Staff recruitment, training and equipment must be revisited to ensure that youth justice workers are capable of intervening early in incidents of violent or disruptive behaviour by detainees and not be reliant on police responses to these situations as is the case at present. The issue of staff capability will be addressed more fully in the Stage Two report of this Review.

The recent announcement by the Government of the funding of an additional 2,729 police officers over the next four years will certainly lead to flow-on additional demands on the Children’s Court and related services and on many areas of the department including Secure Services.

These contextual issues are considered to be highly relevant as this Review has been tasked with reporting on the overall adequacy of the Precinct for its intended purpose. Because of the extensive pressure brought to bear on the youth justice system as a consequence of the changing number and nature of clients now entering this system, it is both reasonable and important to question whether the intended purpose of the Precinct when it was first planned and developed over two decades ago is still a valid basis on which to determine the intended purpose of the Precinct now and for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Having undertaken extensive consultations with key stakeholders, considered previous reports on relevant issues and incidents and inspected the facilities at the Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Justice Precincts on a number of occasions, the Reviewer has concluded that the Parkville Precinct is not adequate for its intended purpose.

The many recognised benefits that flow from positive rehabilitation and education programs and activities will only be fully realised when the safety and security of all clients and staff within the youth justice system can be assured.

To ensure that this imperative is realised, the Reviewer has recommended that the department develop a business plan for the construction of a new youth justice precinct at a suitable location (other than at the current Parkville Precinct). It is also recommended that a number of security and design imperatives are taken into account in this planning process. The security imperatives include precinct perimeter, unit perimeter to secure individual units and internal unit security which requires correctional standard construction of all internal walls, doors, windows and ceilings, and should be capable of being isolated in the event of an incident to prevent escalation and support operational control.

The way forward

Design imperatives that should be accommodated in any new precinct plan include an effective assessment and classification system for clients, a high level intervention unit to allow for management of clients requiring intensive supervision and treatment for medical and health issues, facilities for activities, education and programs, secure areas for family visitation and other community engagement activities and graduated security regimes that include the provision of high risk security accommodation.

The development of a staffing model that best supports these imperatives is also recommended.

Findings:

1. The Parkville Youth Justice Precinct has inherent safety and security issues arising from the construction and design of the Precinct, including its grounds.
2. These safety and security issues impede the proper supervision of young people and are an unacceptable risk to staff and young people.
3. The Precinct is not adequate for its intended purpose.

Recommendations:

4. It is recommended that the department develop a business plan for the construction of a new youth justice precinct at a suitable location (other than at the current Parkville Precinct).
5. It is recommended that in the development of plans for a new youth justice precinct, that consideration is given to:
 - a. the security and design imperatives detailed in this report
 - b. a staffing model that best supports these imperatives; and
 - c. the findings and recommendations arising from the ongoing independent external Armytage/Ogloff review of youth support, youth diversion and youth justice services.

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16 January 2017