

Action Plan to Strengthen Adult Correctional Facilities in Nova Scotia

In the spring of 2008, the Minister of Justice launched an independent external audit of security policies and procedures of adult correctional facilities across the province. Deloitte, a management consulting and audit firm was chosen to conduct the external audit.

On November 4, 2008 the Minister of Justice received the Deloitte report. The 136-page report identified areas of concern and makes 51 recommendations. The Department of Justice started work immediately on implementing the recommendations contained within this report.

“ As in other jurisdictions across Canada, the adult custodial system in Nova Scotia has experienced increasing numbers and changing inmate profiles which has added pressure to the operations of its correctional facilities. ”

Corrections Audit pg. 2

The audit reveals that the increased number of people within the correctional system and increased movement of these individuals have put strains on the system.

With this report, we will change the way we do business.

Fundamentally, the Correctional Services Division at the Department of Justice is fortunate to have dedicated and hardworking employees at all levels who contribute tremendously to public safety in our province. There was strong participation in this audit from a cross-section of Correctional Services employees through focus groups.

Deloitte found that employees and management share the common goal of a secure correctional environment. All Nova Scotians want and need to have confidence in the overall operations of the adult correctional facilities in our province.

Over the next year, officials at the Department of Justice, along with management, staff and stakeholders will address the challenges identified by Deloitte. The Department has appointed a senior person to lead the implementation of

the audit recommendations. Working groups are being formed to address the various problem areas highlighted in the Deloitte Report in the areas of admissions and discharge, administration, safety and security training, transportation and escorts, staffing and communications.

Still, the 51 recommendations will take time to implement. Some are already underway, some can be implemented quickly and some will require further discussion and have budget implications that will impact our operational costs. This response report highlights our priorities and will present a roadmap for the year ahead.

Our Priorities

1. Admissions and Discharge

The area of Admission and Discharge is mission-critical to Corrections. These units must process each person in custody entering or leaving the institution. Over the past few years, the volume of offenders entering through the five adult institutions has increased. For example, at Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility the number has increased by 124 per cent between May 2006 and April 2008. Staffing levels and the processes have not kept pace with the increased volume.

“ Admitting and discharge staff are challenged with cumbersome, inefficient processes that may contribute to mistaken releases or non-compliance with policy. ”

–Corrections Audit pg. 5

Revamping the Admissions Discharge area within Correctional facilities will be our first priority in the upcoming months.

- implement redesigned admission and release processes to improve automation, consistency and compliance
- provide all staff with a new sentence-calculation manual to reduce the possibility of errors
- create a comprehensive training program and refresher program for Correctional staff posted to Admissions & Discharge which includes: warrant interpretation, sentence calculation, current admission and discharge policy and procedure, and specialized technology training

What We
Will Do

**What We Are
Doing or Have
Done Already**

- reviewing the staffing levels and management oversight of the admissions and discharge
- assigned two DOJ staff to assist with the changes requires in admissions and discharge area
- assigned a supervisor in admissions and discharge
- formed a working group comprised of staff from all levels in the admissions and discharge area to implement improvements
- ensuring technology is available and computers are accessible in all admissions and discharge units
- in future capital projects, use an evidence-based admissions volume projection methodology to ensure that the increasing demands on A&D units including remand and intermittent offenders is reflected in facility
- evaluating the data integrity processes of the technology system and identifying appropriate improvements to the system discharge area
- reviewing the policies and procedures which apply when an inmate enters a facility

2. Safety and Security Training

Training is a shared responsibility between Justice head office and correctional facilities. Nova Scotia needs to take a more organized and methodical approach. It was reported that 300 courses were delivered to almost 3,500 participants in 2007/08 totaling more than 45,000 hours of instruction time for Corrections workers

Still, there needs to be improvements to the way Corrections approaches training including establishing a centralized system so the workers and managers know the training levels and experience of their staff. This will allow officials to better manage training and assess training needs of employees.

“ We learned from correctional services leadership in several jurisdictions that Nova Scotia’s training programs are considered desirable and are perceived positively... there are inefficiencies in training planning, delivery and practices for new and existing staff as well as management. ”

— *Corrections Audit pg. 72/pg. 6*

What We Will Do

- enhance the use of Learnnet tracking tool for use at the facilities and head office
- assign a new full-time training contact at Central Nova to co-ordinate training at that facility
- develop new training curriculum tied to verbal crisis intervention in the basic security training
- continue to develop joint policies between Sheriff Services and Correctional Services on risk assessment policy and procedures, training, and vehicle/equipment procurement

**What We Are
Doing or Have
Done Already**

- a lead trainer for use of force and restraints at both Corrections and Sheriff Services has been appointed
- ensure that no employee starts work without basic training
- similar policies for Sheriff Services and Correctional Services with regard to procedures for the transportation of inmates are now in place
- developed a policy and procedure to clarify the application of restraints by offenders security risk level
- develop new training curriculum for use of physical force in unsecured environments for either Correctional Services or Sheriff Services
- policies and procedures to outline authorization procedures for use of intermediate weapons while conducting outside escorts are in place
- a training curriculum for use of physical force in non-secure environments for either Correctional Services or Sheriff Services has been developed
- enhanced management training to Captains, Superintendents and Deputy Superintendents is being delivered

3. Transportation and Escorts

The Department supports the principle that public safety is paramount with relation to the transportation of inmates. On any given year, there are in excess of 24,000 inmate transfers across Nova Scotia. These transfers take place to and from court by Sheriffs officers. Also, Correctional Workers and Officers from adult facilities conduct transfers for medical, emergency and humanitarian reasons.

“ Reports were received of non-compliance to escort policy including not completing transport plans, absence of leg irons or other restraints. ”

— *Audit pg. 32*

Deloitte found that Nova Scotia’s escort policy appears to be consistent with other jurisdictions. At 777 per year, Nova Scotia has a higher number of medical and humanitarian escorts than other jurisdictions. As well, the increase in offenders on remand sentences has meant increased transportation to and from court for appearances. This constant movement has implications for public safety and it is imperative that the Department of Justice ensure the right people with the right training are performing this important duty.

Since May, 2008 Sheriff Services who typically perform more than 90 per cent of those transports, have done all transports of inmates with back-up from police agencies.

- ensure that training in transportation is appropriate and provide the necessary tools to do the job
- examine the need for the number of humanitarian leaves and non-emergent medical leaves
- consult with Capital Health to determine if a procedure is urgently needed or whether it is elective and can wait until the inmate is released
- develop standard operating policy and procedures for the timely collection and disposal of old restraint equipment when new restraints are implemented
- offer cross-divisional training in 2009 to Sheriffs officers and Correctional officers in risk assessment, use of force, escort services scenario based training

What We Will Do

**What We Are
Doing or Have
Done Already**

- examine all three transportation options
- use new restraints including leg irons and single-key handcuffs to reduce the risk to public safety
- clarify our risk assessment procedures
- review our offender search policy
- remove unauthorized security equipment
- an adequate number of Correctional Workers as required by Dept. of Labour has been trained to conduct escorts with the proper equipment

4. Staffing

The report highlights there are systemic challenges facing staff and management within the Corrections system. It has been through the dedication and hard work of individuals, many of whom have a long well-standing careers with Corrections, that business has been conducted day to day in a professional manner.

The high reliance on part time staff and high absenteeism are issues that need further examination.

As well, a number of staff are performing management jobs which increases confusion about roles and responsibilities within the chain of command hierarchy.

“ We observed variation in staffing practices, including inefficient nightly call-out practices, resulting in serious challenges in obtaining unscheduled staff for extra assistance or relief. ”

Corrections Audit pg. 111

What We Will Do

- establish role clarity in front-line staff and management staff
- develop a consistent approach to schedule part-time staff in the largest facilities and examine if a software application would be helpful for scheduling staff
- re-evaluate the need for the sergeant level position through attrition
- examine the conversion of some part-time staff to full-time position
- clarify Correctional Services' roles and responsibilities for all shifts and posts

**What We Are
Doing or Have
Done Already**

- started conducting an in-depth review of staffing levels at Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility, and will continue at each facility using the model and methodology recommended by Deloitte
- actively managing the absenteeism program to address the high absenteeism rates identified by Deloitte
- establish key performance indicators for correctional staff and managers and leadership in each correctional facility

5. Communications

Communications within any large organization can be challenging. Explaining what to do, when to do it and how to do it requires clear communication and a variety of tools. In recent years, the Department of Justice Corrections Division has improved its methods of communication to include technology such as the Internet and email as well as town hall meetings with all staff.

That said, there is more work to do. The department will concentrate on developing stronger connections with front-line staff. Staff from all levels will be more involved in working with management to identify and implement the necessary changes.

“ Correctional Services has a communications model that should work well, but in practice lacks clarity. ”

— *Corrections Audit* pg. 115

What We Will Do

- assign staff with an expertise in communications to work on internal communications;
- include front-line working groups in the implementation of the changes
- increasing the use of email to staff and ensuring that all have access to a computer at work
- provide a website update on the audit implementation
- prepare and post regular bulletins on the audit

**What We Are
Doing or Have
Done Already**

- establish a Department of Justice cross-divisional standing committee comprised of staff and managers and meet to jointly create policy regarding weapons, training, fleet management, procurement
- producing a quarterly newsletter for the past 20 years
- replacing malfunctioning staff radios and batteries in all adult facilities

