

MEDIA RELEASE

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Auditor-General assesses Tasmanian Prison Services use of resources

Auditor-General Rod Whitehead today tabled his report to Parliament on the Tasmania Prison Service (TPS): use of resources. A key focus of the audit was TPS's financial management of its custodial facilities covering the financial years from 2013-14 to 2017-18, with the inclusion of some data for 2018-19.

Mr Whitehead concluded the TPS's resources were not used efficiently and this adversely impacted the effectiveness of the prison service.

Mr Whitehead said, 'TPS had not had a strong approach to modelling of future inmate numbers and associated staffing to ensure it had sufficient resources to run its prisons safely and securely'. Modelling used for predicting inmate numbers relied on a backward view and had not been predictive enough. This led to TPS struggling to cope with changes in Government policy and sentencing, which significantly increased the numbers of inmates during the five year period to 30 June 2018. In short, TPS did not have enough Correctional Officers to effectively and efficiently run the prison service.

The audit identified workforce planning had not been fully developed, while improvements in the rostering of COs were needed to ensure the right staffing levels were achieved across the prison service. TPS had acted to fill resourcing gaps by predominantly using staff overtime. While this mitigation had been essential to ensure the service could operate, it had adverse consequences. Firstly, on the cost of running the service, as overtime rates are expensive. Secondly, this put a strain on existing staff resulting in sickness absences, both short and long term, which had significantly increased in recent years. These absences compounded the situation further, requiring more overtime to ensure the service operated safely and securely.

Mr Whitehead acknowledged TPS had challenges in attracting the right number and calibre of staff to the service. Training new staff takes time, often leading to a delay between the time people commence with TPS and their effective integration into the service. These factors constrain TPS's ability to achieve the right staffing levels to effectively run its service.

Mr Whitehead noted reporting of key areas of both financial and operational performance had not been as developed as they could be, hampering effective decision-making. Mr Whitehead said, 'there had not been a strong approach to ensuring quality information to support sound financial management, monitoring and budgeting practices'.

Mr Whitehead found that all of the above issues were known to the TPS and they were taking steps to address them however many were in the early phase of implementation. He said, 'there will need to be strong governance and leadership to ensure improvements are developed, integrated and implemented effectively'.

Five recommendations were made by Mr Whitehead, which included a focus on appropriate governance arrangements; review of capability and capacity to undertake the improvement program; improve resource and financial modelling; develop and implement improved workforce planning processes and improve the performance management framework.

The complete Report can be downloaded from www.audit.tas.gov.au.

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