

Management of DIMA facilities

Background

- 2.1 The Committee was briefed by the centre management at each of the facilities which it visited. The Committee therefore formed an overview of how the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and its contractor Australasian Correctional Management (ACM) approach their responsibilities. The information provided at the briefings and during the inspections forms the basis of this chapter.

Delegation of DIMA Authority

- 2.2 ACM manages detention facilities on behalf of DIMA. The DIMA Business Manger is in overall control of the centre. At the direction of the Manager ACM exercises delegated authority through the senior ACM manager on site. This means that the staff of ACM handles the day-to-day operations of the centres. ACM are required to provide incident reports to DIMA on occurrences within a detention centre. There are also “Contact Operation Group Meetings” held between DIMA and ACM, which form part of a quarterly review of ACM’s performance against detention standards.
- 2.3 At all centres DIMA and ACM staff reported that their relationship was harmonious.

Services

- 2.4 ACM provides, or arranges for the provision of, administration, catering, security, escorting, transporting, counselling and medical facilities.
- 2.5 In the case of escort duties, the detention provisions of the immigration legislation require that a detainee be in the charge of an immigration officer. Relevant ACM staff therefore have individual authorisation under the immigration legislation.
- 2.6 In a number of the detention centres ACM has sub-contracted the catering to A & K Anderson.

Staff

- 2.7 Staff are generally recruited locally and trained by ACM and DIMA. ACM staff must complete a 420 hour training program and an additional 40 hours of training annually, which includes cross-cultural awareness. In addition, staff are provided with the ACM “Code of Conduct” which makes reference to the importance of maintaining objectivity in dealing with the detainees in a fair and equitable manner.
- 2.8 Many of the ACM staff have had experience in correctional institutions, but the Committee was informed that this background was not necessarily an advantage. This was because the dynamics of a prison system were significantly different from those of a detention centre.
- 2.9 In prisons, for example, the inmates know the period for which they will be detained before being eligible for parole. This was not the case in detention centres, where detainees do not know how long it will be before there is a decision on their case, nor do they know what that decision might be. Staff at detention centres therefore require a different approach to their duties than that which works in the prison system.
- 2.10 However, some medical staff who spoke to the Committee reported that their previous work in correctional facilities had been valuable because it provided experience of working in conditions with limited access to medical practitioners. This gave staff experience in dealing with medical emergencies in the absence of immediate assistance.
- 2.11 ACM has a policy that at temporary and isolated centres, staff have six-week contracts to ensure that they take an essential break from the stress of the job and the climate. The limited contract period also helps to prevent staff from identifying closely with the detainees’ position. Staff are employed on a casual basis and, subject to the number of positions

available, are subsequently able to apply for permanent positions. Permanent positions are subject to a three month probationary period.

- 2.12 The Committee noted that at Pt Hedland many of the staff were locally recruited and could be expected to have a long-term involvement with the centre. At Woomera the Committee observed that some of the staff there had previously worked at the Curtin centre.

ACM approach

- 2.13 The ACM management of the detainees aims to provide dignity and allow freedom of movement within the detention facility. It also aims to facilitate communication between detainees and between staff and detainees to minimise friction.
- 2.14 ACM's policy is to emphasise to the detainees that its staff are not part of the Australian immigration system, and have no influence on decisions being made concerning the detainees' future. The staff are not permitted to discuss the detainees' position among themselves or with the detainees.
- 2.15 At some of the centres staff members have been assigned a number of individual detainees with whom they were expected to make daily contact. Through this arrangement ACM gains knowledge of the activities and concerns of the detainees. This provides the necessary background against which early identification of individual and/or group problems or unrest can be made.
- 2.16 A briefing by DIMA indicated that each detention centre had a Centre Emergency Response Team of six for crisis intervention. The team provides a rapid response to medical, security and safety incidents. When an incident arises the team is constituted from specifically identified detention personnel on routine duties at the centre. Such teams may also be used to supplement staff at other centres if the need arises.
- 2.17 During the briefing at Woomera, the Committee was advised that, in the event of difficulties at the centre, the staff could be reinforced by a team which was available 24 hours a day to fly in.
- 2.18 The Committee noted numbers of staff either moving about among the detainees or observing activity in the centres. The Committee considered it advantageous for the staff to be working among the detainees to supervise and to provide immediate contact between detainees and administration.

- 2.19 In addition, at each centre representatives of the detainees meet regularly with the ACM administration to discuss issues which arise and to ensure that concerns are directed to the appropriate authorities.

Conclusion

- 2.20 ACM is providing guards and catering, health, welfare and educational arrangements formerly provided by the Commonwealth. The total outlay of DIMA *Sub-Program 2.2: Detention* in 1998/99 was \$18.86 million, compared to \$22.54 million the previous year. DIMA changed its program structure in both 1996/97 and 1997/97; therefore costs from previous years are not comparable.¹
- 2.21 The outlays in relation to ACM are not separately identified in the overall cost of the detention program. Even if they were, it would not be possible to compare the costs with those incurred under the previous arrangements because:
- ACM's contact began half way through 1997/98, so the data for that year reflect a mix of both the current and former arrangements; and
 - the contract with ACM is more comprehensive with regard to services to be provided than was the case under the previous arrangements.²
- 2.22 An alternative measure for cost comparison is the average expenditure per detainee per day. In the established centres the cost per head per day increases as numbers fall because fixed charges are divided among fewer people.³
- 2.23 When at full capacity, the cost at established centres under ACM is \$70.41 per person per day (but more at Woomera and Curtin because of their start-up costs). In 1998/99 the average accrued cost per head for detainees was \$112 per day, compared with \$145 in 1997/98.⁴
- 2.24 At the beginning of 1999, DIMA's opinion of the arrangements with ACM was that:

1 DIMA, *Annual Report*, 1997/98; 1998/99

2 DIMA evidence to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal & Constitutional, Legislation Committee, 9/2/99, p. 205.

3 Eg: if Pt Hedland has fewer than 50 detainees, the average cost is \$300 per person per day. DIMA evidence to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal & Constitutional, Legislation Committee, 10/2/00, p. 169.

4 DIMA, evidence to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal & Constitutional, Legislation Committee, 10/2/00, p. 169 *Annual Report*, 1997/98; 1998/99.

if we had a similar range of developments with the previous service provider, we would probably be paying slightly less now than we did previously; but it is difficult to draw that comparison in an empirical way.⁵

- 2.25 The Committee considered that arrangements at the centres provided an even-handed approach to the detainees. In addition, attention to detainees' needs helped to minimise friction and assisted in smooth management of the centres.
- 2.26 The Committee was, however, concerned that some of the services provided could be considered excessive in the broader community. The Committee comments on particular arrangements in the relevant chapters.

5 DIMA, evidence to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal & Constitutional, Legislation Committee, 9/2/99, p. 206.

