

Ormiston Children & Families Trust



Time for Families

Review of Visitor Survey
at HMP Bedford

2004

Contents

Foreword.....	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Developments in provision for families of prisoners at HMP Bedford 2002-2004	4
3. Feedback from visitors about current provision for families at HMP Bedford	7
4. Views of prison staff	13
5. Analysis and recommendations.....	15
Appendix 1: Advisory Group Members	17
Appendix 2: Visitors questionnaire	18

Foreword

This report has been produced by the Ormiston Children and Families Trust as part of its *Time for Families* programme.

Time for Families is a region-wide programme established by, and funded through the Eastern Region Families Partnership (ERFP).

The Partnership combines the funding power and strategic goals of three organisations: Ormiston Trust, the Lankelly Foundation and the Prison Service, to meet the needs of the children and families of prisoners.

The *Time for Families* prison and community based projects work to provide children and their families with appropriate visiting and contact opportunities, one-to-one help, information and assistance.

To find out more about the *Time for Families* programme, contact the Ormiston Children and Families Trust (contact details are given on the back page of this report).

1. Introduction

One of the Eastern Region Families Partnership's key objectives is to consult extensively with children and families, thereby enabling their views to influence how services are developed.

In this context, a visitor survey was undertaken in 2002 at HMP Bedford. (The original survey report can be viewed on www.clinks.org).

Aims of 2002 visitor survey:

- To get a picture of the needs and views of visitors to HMP Bedford.
- To plan improvements to services and facilities for visitors.
- Specifically to input into the planning of a proposed new Visitor Centre.
- As part of the overall strategy of Time for Families, "to highlight the impact of imprisonment upon families, and the value of investing in family support services as a resource in the process of rehabilitation." [2002 Visitor Survey Report].

Issues to be reviewed:

A number of issues were raised during the survey and specific concerns about the needs of families of prisoners at HMP Bedford were highlighted. Some of these required addressing by the prison itself whilst others were more appropriate for consideration by the Eastern Region Families Partnership through its Time for Families project. As part of the action research cycle, the review examines what changes have taken place in the two years since the survey was carried out, evaluates the effectiveness of any developments, and identifies an action plan for the future.

The main issues raised in the first survey which needed to be reviewed were:

- Length of visits (maximum 45 minutes at time of survey).
- Physical conditions in Visits Room (cleanliness, space, noise levels, provision of refreshments).
- Availability of play area within Visits Room for all visits.
- Telephone booking system (difficulties getting through).
- Facilities for children visiting - particularly a lack of Children's Visits.
- Urgent need for a Visitor Centre, to include provision of information and support for families.
- Need to raise awareness amongst prison staff of the issues faced by families of prisoners.

Review Methodology:

Evidence was gathered from the following sources:

- Observation of visiting conditions in the Visitors Centre and the visits room.
- Feedback from visitors as they booked in at the Visitors Centre via questionnaires administered on two visiting days (one weekday and one Sunday) during September 2004.
- Feedback from prison staff and those involved in providing services to families visiting the prison (Ormiston and Spurgeon's staff) via formal/informal meetings.
- Entries in the Visitors Centre comments book.
- Evaluation questionnaires completed by prisoners and children/carers who take part in Children's Visits.
- Statistical information collected by Ormiston project staff.
- Ormiston at HMP Bedford's annual Project Review: May 2004.

Timing of the review:

The relatively long interval between the original visitor survey and this follow-up review was designed to allow sufficient time for some major new developments to become established. The new Visitors Centre at HMP Bedford was opened in January 2004, so had been in operation for around eight months at the time of the review.

However any establishment or project undergoes a process of continual assessment and revision to some extent and some more minor changes were taking place around the time of this Review. Visiting days and procedures for booking-in visitors on arrival at the prison had both very recently been changed and so it is acknowledged that any formal review procedure can only reflect the situation at one point in time. Nevertheless both the prison service and voluntary organisations working within the establishment have demonstrated a willingness to keep monitoring the impact of changes in order to achieve the best outcomes for all concerned.

2. Developments in provision for children and families of prisoners at HMP Bedford 2002-2004

Ormiston at HMP Bedford

Through funding from Eastern Region Families Partnership and HMP Bedford, the Ormiston at HMP Bedford project was established in 2003. The project employs a Project Leader, Wendy Davis, for 32 hours a week and a senior Project Worker, Sharon Copperwheat for 20 hours a week (increased in September 2004 from 28 and 17.5 hours). To date there is also one female voluntary worker attached to the project.

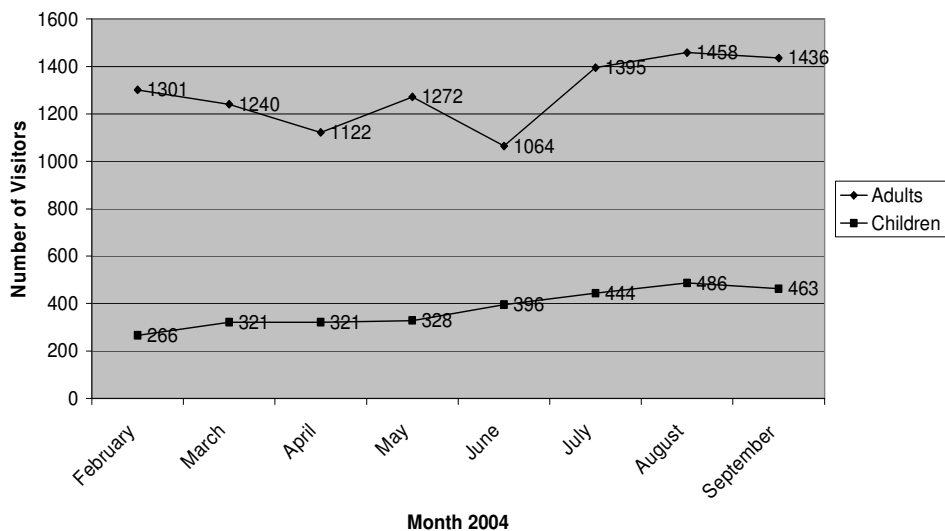
In January 2004 a newly-built **Visitors Centre** was opened. This was officially opened by the Prisons Minister, Paul Goggins, in April 2004. The Visitors Centre is operated by Ormiston staff and is open for prison visitors every day except Mondays from 12.30 - 4.30pm. Staff are also available at other times for planning, one-to-one work with prisoners and operational work.

The Visitors Centre is situated in a converted Victorian building fronting on to the main road a few yards from the prison entrance. It has its own play area, waiting area with soft chairs and coffee tables, tea bar and booking in area. Leaflets offering information and support for adults and children are available in a variety of languages. The Centre also offers toilets and a nappy changing room. A ramp provides access for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Office space is available upstairs for Ormiston staff and is also used for meetings and by others such as the CARATS team.

All visitors arrive at the Visitors Centre before their visit and are booked in by a member of prison staff. Ormiston staff support the visitors in order to encourage contact and help in maintaining family ties. The chart which follows shows the number of visitors who have used the Visitors Centre (including those having Children's Visits) from February to September 2004:

Number of Visitors through the Visitor Centre Feb - Sept 2004



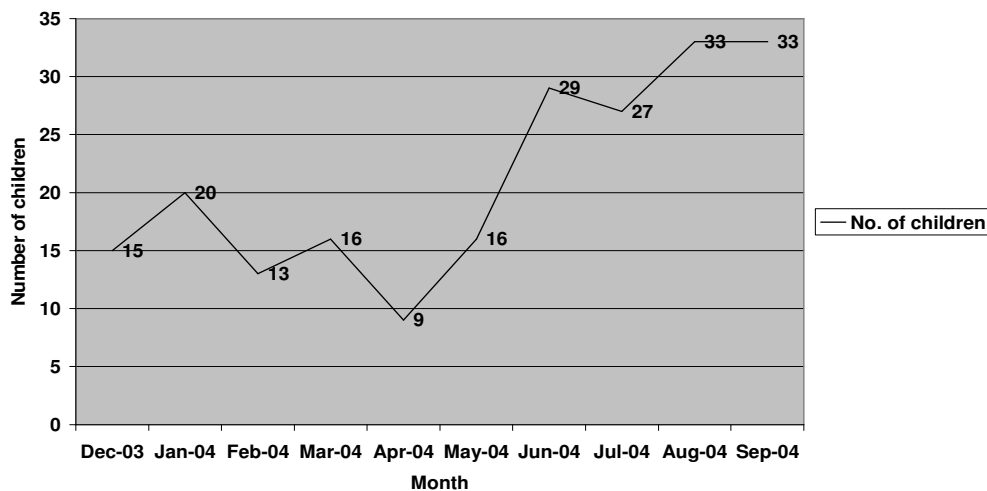
As well as running the Visitors Centre, Ormiston staff have established weekly **Children's Visits** since October 2003. These operate in the Visits Hall on Wednesdays from 11am - 1pm for up to six prisoners and their families each session. (The times were changed very recently from the original time of 2-4pm.)

Tables are moved aside and easy chairs, toys and games arranged to provide a more welcoming and appropriate environment. Staff from Ormiston and Spurgeon's Childcare plus a volunteer facilitate the visit and sandwiches and refreshments are available. Photographs are taken for the families. Ormiston staff meet prisoners before their first visit to explain the procedure and answer any relevant questions.

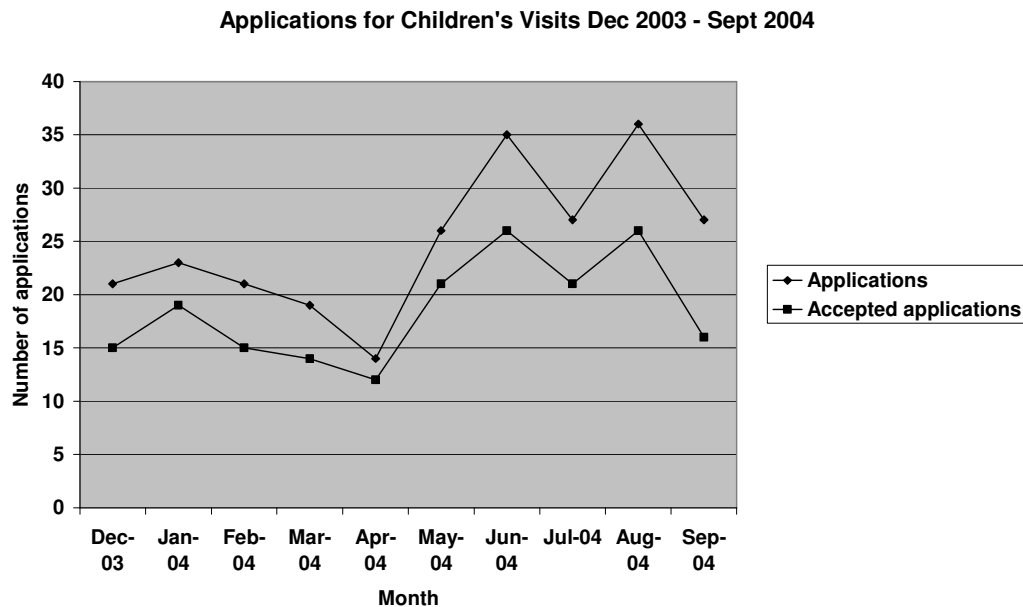
All prisoners with children who have been in custody for one month are eligible to apply for Children's Visits but undergo security checks before being approved. Applications from fathers with new babies are given priority to facilitate early bonding.

The numbers of children having Children's Visits since they were introduced are shown below:

Number of children having Children's Visits Dec 2003 - Sept 2004



The number of families applying, and being accepted for Children's Visits during the same period are shown below:



Information about the family support offered by Ormiston at HMP Bedford is given to all prisoners on **Induction**. The information leaflet also offers prisoners a chance to speak individually to an Ormiston worker about children's issues if they wish.

Recent funding has been agreed from the Harpur Trust to enable Ormiston to employ a learning co-ordinator at HMP Bedford. This will enable fathers at the prison to take part in an **accredited parenting course** called 'You and your child.' These aim to improve prisoners' knowledge and confidence in themselves as parents and contribute towards strengthening family ties. Courses are expected to begin early in 2005.

Prison play area

The children's play area in the visits room was previously staffed by Spurgeon's Childcare three days a week. Funding from Eastern Region Families Partnership has now enabled Spurgeon's to offer this facility on weekends also, which are the busiest times for visits by families with children.

Visiting hours

Since the 2002 Visitor Survey the length of all domestic visits has been increased from 45 minutes to one hour.

3. Feedback from visitors about current provision for families at HMP Bedford

Methodology

All visitors arriving in the Visitors Centre on two visiting days during September 2004 were asked to complete a short questionnaire (appendix 2). One weekday and one Sunday were chosen to reflect different visiting patterns. There are two visits sessions per day, usually catering for around 30 visits per session during the week and around 40 at weekends.

During the first day of administering questionnaires, visitors willing to participate were offered a choice of the researcher asking the questions verbally, or self-completion of the questionnaires. The majority completed questionnaires themselves in writing, but few open questions were completed and subsequent conversations revealed that several had been confused, eg by rating scales or difficulties with literacy.

Consequently on the second day of the survey most visitors were invited only to respond verbally to the questionnaire. This resulted in fuller responses and less confusion but allowed time for fewer visitors to participate. A lack of privacy in the crowded Visitors Centre may also have influenced some responses. More visitors declined to participate on the second day; this may or may not have been linked with the change of approach. More visitors were also pre-occupied with small children on the second day (weekend) and many lacked sufficient time between booking-in and the start of their visit to take part.

Some visitors completed questionnaires individually (34 females and 3 males), while others (in 7 instances) chose to complete them as a couple or family group. **A total of 45 questionnaires were completed by visitors** (24 on day one, 20 on day two). Although the final numbers were less than had been anticipated, it was felt that they were sufficiently high to provide a fair enough reflection of the views of most visitors at that time. Visitors from a range of minority ethnic groups participated.

Additional feedback from visitors was obtained from an analysis of entries in the Visitors Centre Comments book and from evaluation forms completed by those having Children's Visits.

Visitors Centre

The questionnaire sought to assess how visitors used the Visitors Centre and their awareness of what it had to offer. One important function envisaged for the Centre was the provision of information both about the prison and about family support, in an accessible form for visitors. A wide variety of leaflets are displayed, many translated into several different languages. First-time visitors are also given a 'New Visitor Pack' containing a range of information when they book in.

Half the respondents said they had read some of the information leaflets in the Visitors Centre. Those who said they *hadn't* read any were asked their reasons, but only three responded. Two said they were not interested and one said she had seen them before. Evidence from staff indicates that literacy is an issue for a significant minority, but it is unsurprising that few identified this.

Apart from the use of photos to illustrate prison life, no other alternative mediums, such as videotape, are available as yet to convey information to visitors.

Of the 23 respondents who *had* read information leaflets in the Visitors Centre, 15 (two-thirds) said they found it "very useful", seven (one-third) said it was "fairly useful" and one

“not very useful”. Asked to name specific information they had found helpful, the responses were as follows (some people named more than one):

TYPE OF INFORMATION	NUMBER WHO SAID IT WAS USEFUL
Information about the prison	6
New Visitor Pack	5
“everything”	4
What to tell the children	2
Action for Prisoners’ Families’ booklets	2
Children’s Visits	1

Visitors were also asked about different types of help or benefit they may have received from the Visitors Centre. Most visitors felt unable to say they had received specific types of help, such as financial advice or referral to another service, simply because they had not sought such help. Within the limitations of the survey it was not possible to say whether or not all visitors were aware that help of this type was available from Visitors Centre staff if wanted.

Few people appeared to be expressing negative experiences of seeking help, although six people felt the Visitors Centre had *not* helped them to “understand prison rules better”. Whether this implied that information or advice had been lacking or unhelpful, or whether it was an expression of frustration with “the system” generally is not clear. This area deserves further investigation.

On the positive side, several people felt they had definitely been helped by the Visitors Centre in various ways, particularly in understanding prison rules and in helping them feel more relaxed during visits. The comments made (see below) particularly emphasise the friendliness and helpfulness of the “lady on the desk”, who at the time of the survey was the Ormiston project leader.

Responses to the statements regarding help from the Visitors Centre are shown below:

The Visitors Centre helped me: (please tick)

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE	NON-RESPONSE
a) Find help from another service	3	5	1	0	22	13
b) Get financial help	3	1	1	0	29	8
c) Understand prison rules better	4	19	4	2	5	7
d) Feel more relaxed during visits	7	21	3	1	2	8
e) Listen to me and gave me support	4	10	1	0	17	10

Nearly half those completing the questionnaire offered additional comments about the Visitors Centre or their experience of visiting in general. Many visitors were keen to praise

the helpfulness of the Visitors Centre staff but there were also some frustrations expressed, particularly about visits not always starting on time. A wheelchair user said that staff had helped her with all her extra needs, including parking and toilets.

Some comments appear contradictory - for example, descriptions of the Visitors Centre as either "nice and quiet" or "overcrowded at weekends". There does seem to be a marked contrast between the relatively calm and relaxed atmosphere during the week when there are fewer visits and smaller numbers of children and the much more frenetic environment at weekend visiting times, when the Centre fills to capacity or beyond.

At these times Ormiston staff are generally required to assist with the booking in processes in order to move visitors through the system as fast as possible and prevent delays. This means that - unless visitors arrive very early when it is quieter - there is little opportunity during weekend visits for staff to offer the individual attention or support for which their role is designed. An additional OSG (member of prison staff) on duty in the Visitors Centre on busy weekends would free up Ormiston staff from the routine administrative tasks and enable them to spend more time with the children and families.

Other comments made about the Visitors Centre during the survey were:

- *The children's area is good.*
- *It's better than I thought it would be.*
- *The lady on the desk helped me with various queries and gave me the number of the families' Helpline.*
- *Staff are very nice here, especially the lady on the front desk.*
- *Very helpful lady on the desk - she's helped me sort out problems with my VO's etc. The Prison officers are very amenable too.*
- *Helpful and friendly staff.*
- *They're here to do a job.*
- *Need a public telephone here..*
- *The system of numbered tickets doesn't work - first arrivals don't get in first.*
- *Smoke gets into the Visitors Centre from smokers on the doorstep and ramp.*

Visitors also commented about other aspects of visiting the prison:

- *Some of the prison rules are not very clear.*
- *You can't bring things in at weekends.**
- *The prison are very unhelpful with queries.*
- *The booking system needs more phone lines.*
- *Visits always start late even though I'm here on time.*
- *One hour's visit is too short.*

*Procedures have since been changed so that property can be brought in at weekends.

Comments Book

In addition to seeking visitors' views via the questionnaire, an analysis was made of comments written in the Visitors' comments book which has been placed in the Visitors Centre since soon after its opening. Visitors are encouraged to use the book and comments are regularly noted and responded to by a senior prison officer.

Many visitors had made use of the book (75 entries from March - October 2004). The issues raised were very similar to those made during the survey and listed above. Around a third of entries praised the Visitors Centre staff or facilities in some way, while several people felt

that the whole visiting process, and especially the play facilities in the visits room, was well run.

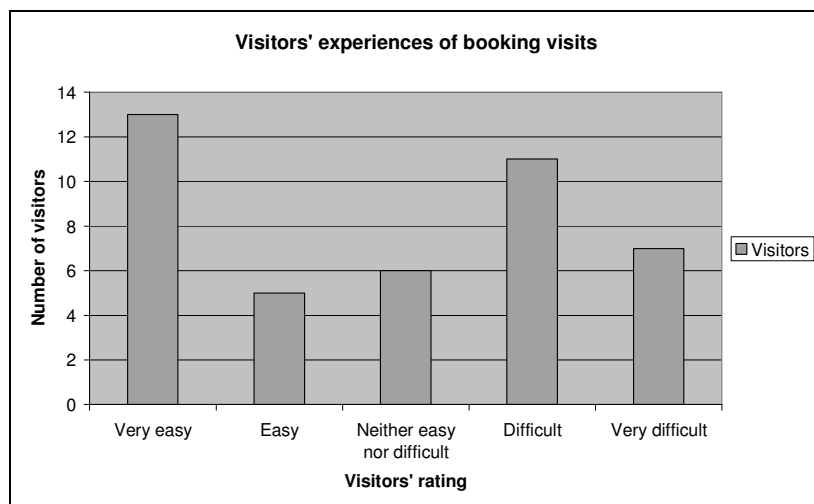
Twelve entries complained that they had less than the full hour's visit entitlement, and 8 others felt visits should be longer than one hour. These were the single biggest issues. A new system was due to be brought into operation just after this survey and it was hoped that this would improve the punctuality of visits.

Complaints about VO's being delayed or not stamped or incorrect occurred six times. Three people complained about rudeness from 'the man on the booking line' (end of March). Some visitors complained about the lack of choice in the visits room canteen - although other visitors felt these were unreasonable complaints.

Booking Visits

Difficulty in getting through on the telephone to book visits was a particular issue raised in the 2002 Visitors Survey. At that time only about a third of visitors reported being able to get through at the first attempt, whilst the rest reported having to make more than five calls on average before getting through.

In this review, visitors were asked to rate the ease or difficulty with which they booked their visit on a scale from one to five. The responses are shown below:



The responses show a mixed picture, with an equal split between those reporting good and bad experiences ("very easy/easy" = 18; "difficult/very difficult" = 18). On the whole this did not appear to be such a burning issue for visitors as it had been two years ago. This situation is however changeable.

Earlier in the summer of 2004 both the Visitors Centre staff and the Prisoners' Families Helpline reported receiving many complaints from visitors about difficulties with the booking line, including unhelpful answer-phone messages. Both the Helpline Co-ordinator and Ormiston project leader reported testing the line themselves and having great difficulty getting through, although the Governor in charge of visits said he had also checked several times and had rarely found the line busy.

Changes to the answer-phone message have since been made and at the time of writing fewer complaints were being reported. Further changes to the booking system were under consideration at the time of the survey, including the possibility of enabling visitors to book visits in person at the Visitors Centre at weekends, if staffing for this service could be

agreed. There was a consensus between Visitors Centre and prison staff that this is an important issue and needs to be kept under review.

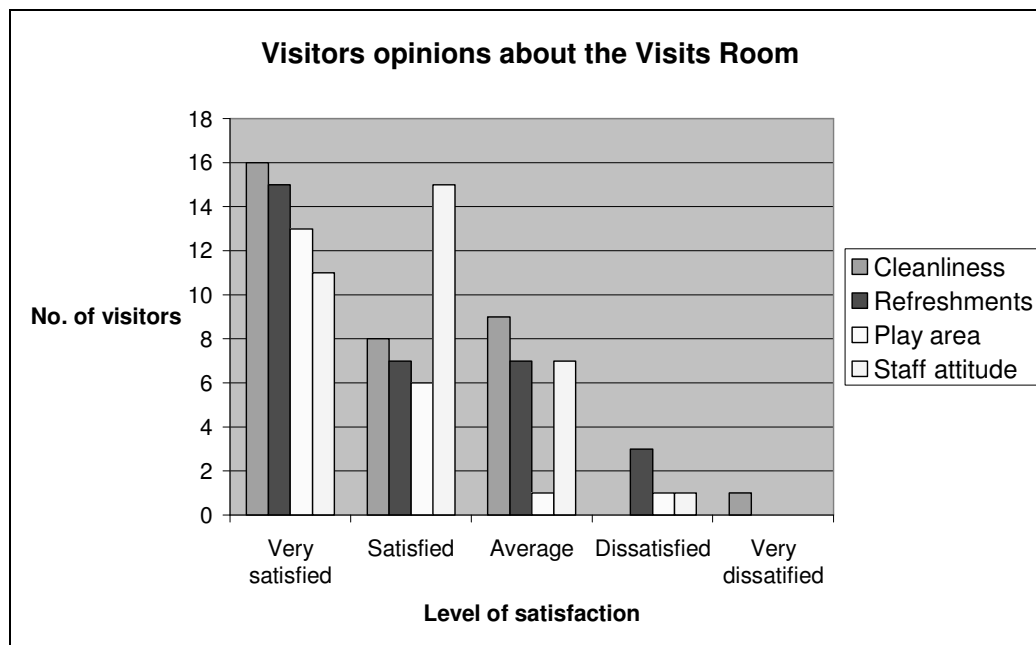
Punctuality of visits

There were only a few complaints about delays in visits starting in the 2002 survey, although when the visits were only 45 minutes long, even a small delay caused great frustration to visitors. When asked in the 2004 review whether their last visit started on time, visitors were evenly divided between those saying “yes” and “no”. However the majority of the “no’s” said their visit was less than 10 minutes late and nobody said it was more than 10 minutes. There was no significant difference between the weekday and weekend visitors in this respect.

As previously mentioned, the prison has extended the visiting time since the last survey from 45 minutes to one hour, following many complaints that visits were too short. The change to longer visits is much to be welcomed, although even one hour is still shorter than the visits times even in many local prisons today. There are no plans to further extend the length of visits.

Visits room

The review showed a significant increase in the level of visitor satisfaction with the visits room than was found two years ago. Visitors’ opinions were sought on four areas: the cleanliness of the room, the refreshments available, the play area and the attitude of prison staff. The results are shown below:



Play area

Many visitors without children did not comment on the play area, so the number of responses in this category are lower. The previous survey had noted that visitors were disappointed that the play area was not available at weekends, when the majority of families with children tend to visit. However Spurgeons are now able to open the play area for virtually all visits with additional funding from Eastern Region Families Partnership and this seemed to be much appreciated.

Refreshments

Since 2002 the running of the visits room canteen has been taken over by the prison although retaining most of the same voluntary workers as before. A new contract with Aramark was being implemented during this survey, which might affect visitors' opinions. The change was being made with the intention of improving the service with more choice, although it was anticipated that prices might become slightly less competitive.

Cleanliness

Observation of the visits room during the survey confirmed most visitors' views that it was clean and in good decorative order; fans had also been introduced to regulate the air temperature.

Attitude of prison staff

Visitors' positive opinions about the attitude of prison staff during visits compares well with both the previous survey, and with many other prisons too, according to other research which has often found a low level of awareness among prison staff of the needs of families of prisoners (*Just Visiting, 2001*). Whilst the 2002 Bedford survey found gate staff (OSG's) to be particularly helpful, there had been little awareness among prison officers in general of the pressures faced by the families. With the development of the Visitors Centre and the presence there of staff with a specific remit to support children and families, a higher profile for families within the prison generally seems to have been achieved. Ormiston's project leader noted that working in the Visitors Centre was a popular duty for prison staff.

Bringing children on domestic visits

Of the 45 respondents, 22 (49%) said they did not have children. Of those 23 who did have children, 11 had brought children to the visit that day whilst 12 had not. As well as the 12 who had chosen not to bring any of their children to the visit that day, a further six families had only brought one or some of their children.

Reasons why some children were not brought were explored. Many different reasons were given, some relating to visiting conditions but others not (some gave more than one reason):

REASON FOR NOT BRINGING CHILD/REN	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
They would miss school	4
I don't like them being searched	2
They would get too upset	2
Journey is too difficult/expensive	2
They couldn't /don't want to come	2
Children are from a previous relationship	2
They're too young to understand that dad can't get up & play	1
Poor facilities/conditions for children	1
I don't want them to come	1
I'm not visiting a relative so it's not appropriate	1

Children's Visits

Of the 23 respondents who said they have children, 16 (70%) said they had heard about Children's Visits. Those completing the survey included five first-time visitors to HMP Bedford, so taking this into account, awareness of this provision seemed high.

Only six of those who knew about Children's Visits had actually had one. Reasons for this were not sought, but some mentioned that their partner had not been in custody long

enough, or was only serving a short sentence. One partner's application had been turned down by security. Another felt it was not appropriate as her daughter was aged 16.

Three of the six families who had had a Children's Visit said they chose to bring their children only to this type of visit and were grateful that they were able to bring the children to see their fathers without subjecting them to the less child-friendly domestic visits.

The six families were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with Children's Visits. Four said they were "very satisfied", one was "satisfied" and there was one non-response.

After each Children's Visit, feedback is sought from both the children (at a very simple level) and fathers who take part. Analysis of the evaluation sheets showed an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response. Children loved the chance to play with their fathers and the only difficulty was having to separate at the end of the visit. Many prisoners felt moved to write letters of thanks after their visits. These are too numerous to include in their entirety, but some typical comments are shown below:

- *It gave me a chance to spend quality time with my son and wife in a comfortable environment and hold my baby son throughout.*
- *I'm in jail to be punished and for the first time I feel you're not punishing my daughter...it makes you less angry at being in jail and keeps you out of trouble so you can get home quicker to be a good dad.*
- *I'm on cloud nine at the moment, I loved seeing my family...everyone was blinding from the ladies that organised it to the Officers for not getting on our cases.*
- *It made me feel close to my daughter again. She's only 2 and the normal visits are no good really for playing and spending proper time with her.*
- *My sincere and heartfelt thanks to you and your assistants for making a very difficult and emotional time infinitely more bearable...your invaluable help has enabled us to maintain a close family bond where otherwise that bond would have been severely strained...I would not have seen my children, out of choice, had my only option been a standard visit.*
- *Thanks to the Prison Service for its enlightened attitude to families and to the officers for their discreet presence which allowed my children to relax and enjoy their time with me.*

4. Views of prison staff

This review was undertaken with the full support of the Governor of HMP Bedford, Guy Baulf and his staff. Both the present Governor and his predecessor at the time of the original survey have shown a commitment to addressing the needs of families of prisoners and to finding out more about their experiences when visiting the prison. Importance is attached to exploring issues such as the way visitors are made to feel and the way in which these factors can impact on prisoners.

The views of members of prison staff involved with visits were conveyed through a meeting with Gov Ian Blakeman and through talking informally with staff on duty in the Visitors Centre and with staff running the play area in the visits room. Through the review an impression was sought of how staff felt the developments in facilities for children and families were working and what impact they were felt to be having on either staff, families or prisoners.

The following points were raised:

Visitors Centre

- It was felt to have been a smooth transition towards the development of the Visitors Centre; any initial operational problems had largely been ironed out.
- The Visitors Centre creates a nicer environment for both visitors and staff and makes it easier for visits staff as there is less pressure to get visitors in off the street.
- The extra office space is welcomed and well-used, for example by the CARATS team.
- The Visitors Centre is felt to have created an increased awareness of family issues by operations staff.
- Fewer official complaints are now received from visitors; most complaints that do arise tend to be made either through the Comments book or verbally, when they can usually be more easily resolved.

Children's Visits

- Staff are generally very impressed with the Children's Visits and acknowledge that these are popular and have received high praise from both prisoners and the Inspectorate.
- Some staff feel Children's Visits should be used as incentives to achieve compliance and good behaviour rather than being available to all prisoners who meet the security requirements.
- Staff have been getting more complaints recently about Children's Visits being denied because of a recent increase in security measures being taken.

Booking

- Staff acknowledge there have been some problems with the booking line, but do not feel there are major difficulties now. However other options for improvement are under consideration, such as a call waiting system and enabling visitors to book visits in person at the Visitors Centre at weekends.

Visits room

- The **play area** is highly regarded by prison staff. Observation confirmed that this is a brightly decorated, well-run facility with a good selection of toys and activities. It is well used by children. However the size of the play area is a big problem - it gets very full at weekends and needs to be bigger; there is no room for older children to play safely, nor would there be adequate room for children using wheelchairs, although provision generally for children with disabilities is excellent. Most activity is therefore aimed at young children, although staff do their best to cater for older children within the limited space.

Since the introduction of weekend opening, the play area has experienced some staffing problems; in particular it is difficult to recruit volunteers at weekends. This is also a problem for the Visitors Centre.

- Punctuality in starting visits was felt to have improved. New staff regimes ensure that staff finish lunch 15 minutes earlier so they can get there on time.
- Although no hard evidence is available, visitors are thought to be more relaxed and there is a decrease in prisoners' anxiety about whether their visitors have arrived as the Visitors Centre manager phones through to say when someone has arrived.
- Since the opening of the Visitors Centre and the input into induction by Ormiston staff, prison officers seem to get fewer family queries.

Visitors Centre staff

The Ormiston staff in the Visitors Centre have played a key role in facilitating this review and have lent their full support and cooperation throughout the process. Their feedback on the recent developments for children and families at HMP Bedford has informed much of this review. Additional comments and views expressed both during the review process and within the framework of their annual Project Review are included here:

- Forging links with key prison personnel has enhanced the service being offered for all aspects of the project, allowing the day to day running of the project to be smoother. Ormiston staff are recognised and respected by the prison.
- Greater consistency of prison staff working in the Visitors Centre would be helpful. Differing approaches by different staff (eg about what ID is acceptable) cause frustration for visitors and extra stress on Ormiston staff.
- Many visitors would like two hour visits.
- The amount of time it takes to run a Visitors Centre needs reviewing. The Centre needs an Ormiston member of staff there for every visit session.
- Recruitment of volunteers is difficult, particular at weekends.

5. Analysis and recommendations

Since the 2002 Visitor Survey was carried there have been huge changes in the level of 'family friendliness' at HMP Bedford. The 2002 survey Report noted how, even for regular visitors to prison, visits were frequently stressful experiences. This was confirmed and illustrated in Ormiston's recent research study of children and families affected by imprisonment ('Sentenced Families' 2004).

Nationally, visitor numbers have been falling, despite rises in the prison population. This gives cause for concern both for the children who have little contact with their imprisoned parents and for the chances of reducing re-offending amongst prisoners whose family ties are weakened.

It was against this backdrop that changes were introduced by HMP Bedford, working in partnership with Ormiston Children and Families Trust and Spurgeon's Childcare. The principle changes noted by this Review are:

- Opening of a staffed Visitors Centre
- Introduction of weekly Children's Visits
- Increased availability of staffed play facilities in the visits room
- Extension of domestic visits from 45 minutes to one hour
- Improved physical conditions in the visits room
- More positive perception by visitors of prison staff.

The evidence gathered for this review presents an extremely positive picture of the changes which have taken place and the feedback from the staff and most importantly, the service users. At the same time, HMP Bedford has moved up the performance tables for prisons in England and Wales from Level 3 to Level 4, having been judged to be "delivering exceptional levels of performance". It is within this context that any outstanding concerns should be seen. These are recorded overleaf.

Issues to take forward

A small number of areas of concern or need for improvement inevitably remain. These have been highlighted in the report and are summarised below. (The list does *not* reflect an order of priority.)

1. Length of visits - although extended from 45 to 60 minutes, the duration is shorter than at many prisons and remains a concern for many families.
2. Punctuality of visits - some concerns still exist about delays in starting visits.
3. Booking line - complaints about getting through fluctuate and this needs to be closely monitored.
4. Visiting Orders - several complaints were made about these not being stamped or having incorrect information.
5. Play area in the visits room - while well run, the space available is inadequate for the number of users and needs to be addressed as a priority.
6. Visitors Centre - more staffing, both Operational Support Grades (OSG's) and volunteers - is needed at weekends and busy periods to free up Ormiston project staff from booking-in tasks to enable them to be more available for family support.
7. Having a regular team of OSG's assigned to the Visitors Centre would help to achieve greater consistency of approach for visitors.
8. Visitors Centre facilities - provision of a public telephone and information in alternative formats (eg video) would be welcomed.
9. The Visitors Centre becomes overcrowded at busy periods, reducing the ability to provide a relaxing and supportive environment for children and families. Whilst this is a difficult issue to resolve, it deserves further discussion in order to maximise its potential.

Recommendation

It is recommended that through the Governor and Advisory Group of HMP Bedford these outstanding issues are considered and an action plan drawn up to address future improvements. By continuing to review and update services it is likely that HMP Bedford will maintain its ability to support strong family ties for its prisoners and their families.

Appendix 1:

Ormiston at HMP Bedford: Advisory Group members as at 01.04.04

Wendy Munro (Chair)	Ormiston Operations Manger
Jean Abbott	Independent Monitoring Board
Gov Ian Blakeman	HMP Bedford - Visits
Sharon Copperwheat	Senior project worker, Ormiston
Wendy Davis	Project leader, Ormiston
Rachael Creighton	Chaplain
PO Lyndon Harris	HMP Bedford - Operations
Deborah Ireland	Induction / Probation
Lynne Summerfield	Spurgeons Childcare

Appendix 2: Visitors questionnaire

HMP Bedford Visitor Survey 2004

About You:

1. Are you: Male Female
2. Have you brought a child/children to this visit today?
Yes No I don't have any children (*please go to question 8*)
3. Do you have any children who are not visiting today?
Yes No
4. If Yes, which of the following reasons apply?

a) Journey is too difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>	f) Journey is too expensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) They don't want to come	<input type="checkbox"/>	g) They don't know Dad's in prison	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) I don't like them to be searched	<input type="checkbox"/>	h) They get too bored	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) They would miss school	<input type="checkbox"/>	i) They would get too upset	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Dad doesn't want them to come	<input type="checkbox"/>	j) Other reasons:	<input type="checkbox"/>

Children's Visits:

5. Have you heard of 'Children's Visits' on Wednesdays?
Yes No (*please go to question 8*)
6. If Yes, have you had a Children's Visit?
Yes No
7. If Yes, how satisfied were you with the visit?
Please circle a number from 1 - 5:

Very satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Not at all satisfied

Visitors Centre:

8. Have you read any of the information leaflets in the Visitors Centre?
Yes *please go to question 9*
No *please go to question 11*
Don't remember *please go to question 12*
 9. How useful was the information you read? (*please circle*)
Very useful / fairly useful / not very useful
 10. Please tell us which leaflets you found useful or not useful,
eg 'What do I tell the children?' leaflet - useful
-

11. If you haven't read any information leaflets in the Visitors Centre, please tick any of these statements if you agree with them:

I was not interested in them I did not know about them
 I had seen them before I could not read them
 Other (please state) _____

12. Please say how far you agree with the following statements:

The Visitors Centre helped me: *(please tick)*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) Find help from another service				
b) Get financial help				
c) Understand prison rules better				
d) Feel more relaxed during visits				
e) Listen to me and gave me support				

13. Please add any further comments here:

Booking:

14. How easy / difficult was it to book your visit?

Please circle a number from 1 - 5:

very easy 1 2 3 4 5 very difficult

Ordinary domestic visits:

15. Did your last visit start on time?

Yes No Haven't had a visit before

16. If No, how late was it?

Less than 10 minutes 10-30 minutes

More than 30 minutes Can't remember

17. How do you rate the following aspects of the visits room? (please circle a number from 1 to 5)

Cleanliness: Very satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Not at all satisfied

Refreshments: Very satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Not at all satisfied

Play area: Very satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Not at all satisfied

Attitude of prison staff:

Very satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Not at all satisfied

Thank you for your help 😊

Time for Families

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