

**Opening Remarks – Public Accounts Committee:
OAG Audit Report on Yukon Corrections
Deputy Minister Tom Ullyett**

- Good morning.
- The Department of Justice is pleased to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to respond to the audit conducted by the Auditor General of Canada during the examination period of April 2012 to March 2013.
- I would like to start by introducing some key officials from the department who are here with me today.
- Robert Riches, assistant deputy minister of Community Justice and Public Safety, and Tricia Râtel, director of the Yukon Corrections Branch.
- This morning we are looking forward to responding to your questions. Should you find that you require supplementary information, it will be prepared and sent to you as soon as possible.
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Office of the Auditor General for their professionalism and dedication to helping the department meet its key responsibilities for offenders within the Corrections system.
- I would also like to thank the departmental staff who supported the audit process.
- The Department of Justice views the audit process as beneficial and significant opportunity to focus on improvement.

- As noted by the Auditor General, at p. 21 of the report, the scope of the audit was two-fold; offender as the report focused on offender management (both those at WCC and those under community supervision) and facility management (day to day operation of the Whitehorse Correctional Centre).

Challenges in 2012-2013

- As noted in paragraph 29 of the report, the audit's examination period was the first year the new Whitehorse Correctional Centre was opened (2012/13). The bulk of the audit process was performed during a period of transition for Yukon Corrections.
- The move to the new correctional facility in March 2012 was, of course, a logistical challenge, and a challenge for staff who were required to learn the inner-workings of the new building and establish necessary protocols in a short period of time to ensure the safety of Corrections staff, volunteers and clients.
- During this time of transition, we experienced staff capacity issues and competing priorities that taxed our ability to ensure the development and provision of evidence-based programming.

The Operating Environment

- At this time, I would like to emphasize Yukon Corrections' operating environment as described in pages 1 and 2 of the Report.

- During the 2013-14 fiscal year, there were 732 admissions to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre and 1003 individuals on probation orders, conditional sentences and bail orders.
- The majority of these were male and of First Nations ancestry.
- The average sentence length was 30 days for women and 87 days for men.
- It is estimated that 90 percent of Yukon offenders have substance abuse issues and there is a significant prevalence of mental health issues and FASD.

Audit Findings and Recommendations

- The Auditor General's report provides five recommendations. Additional points were made within the narrative of the report. These recommendations note where the Department was not in full compliance during the audit period, which we accept.
- While full implementation and refinement of some of these gaps is still occurring, internal accountability mechanisms that are aimed at ensuring compliance with legislation and practice standards are being fully implemented and reviewed through quality assurance measures.
- The five recommendations made by the Auditor General in the Report are helpful because they have provided us with an opportunity to improve our services to offenders.

- They are being acted upon and will serve to improve the care and service provided to Corrections clients at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre and to those clients under community supervision.
- To summarize, the five recommendations made by the Auditor General focused on:
 - compliance with case management policies that aim to rehabilitate, heal and reintegrate offenders into their communities by completing needs and risk assessments for all offenders, developing case plans that are reviewed updated as required, developing transition plans for those moving from the Whitehorse Correctional Centre to community supervision, and conducting return-to-custody interviews with repeat offenders;
 - ensuring that core rehabilitative programs are accessible to offenders at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, as well as those under community supervision, including those in communities outside of Whitehorse;
 - support for probation officers, including training opportunities and the review of policies and procedures that aid them in the integrated management of offenders under community supervision;
 - the provision of training in First Nations culture and heritage for all corrections and probation officers; and
 - the provision and delivery of correctional services and programs that incorporate the cultural heritage of Yukon

First Nations to better meet the needs of First Nations offenders.

Offender Management

The Department is not adequately preparing offenders for successful reintegration into the community.

- At this time, I would like to address the audit report's recommendations and provide a summary of what measures are being implemented to achieve positive outcomes in offender management at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre and in Yukon's communities.
- In terms of case management policy compliance, the Department has used the Auditor General's recommendations to identify deficiencies in compliance by introducing quality assurance processes and reviews on a biannual basis for integrated offender management files in each of the reported areas: risk assessment, case management, transition planning and return-to-custody interviews.
- A quality assurance review of Integrated Offender Management and Offender Supervision and services files was conducted between April 1, 2014 and March 31, 2015.
- The review looked at several key components of integrated offender case management:

- The completion of needs/risk assessments to identify the necessary interventions required to rehabilitate offenders;
 - The development of case management plans for offender rehabilitation and reintegration;
 - The development of case plans from custody, through the transition to community supervision, and;
 - The conduction and timeliness of return-to-custody interviews.
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- I would be happy to share the results of this quality assurance review later in today's proceedings as the picture is quite different today than it was during the audit's evaluation period.
 - With respect to the delivery of core programming at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, it is often challenging to provide all the core programming outlined in case management plans during the relatively short stays experienced by many offenders.
 - Corrections staff are adhering to policies and procedures by engaging in the systematic prioritization of core programming, based on individual case management plans.
 - Detailed transition planning has been implemented to ensure that gaps in delivery of core programs are mitigated once the offender comes under community supervision.
 - The same systematic prioritization or core programming needs exist for those offenders under community supervision.

- This is supported by the quality assurance measures being implemented by Yukon Corrections.
- In addition to the progress that has been made in the areas of case management, risk assessments, transition planning and return-to-custody interviews, a strategy to enhance core program delivery has been developed and is being implemented.
- The strategy comprises several facets including:
 - Refresher training for all staff in existing core programs;
 - Additional facilitation skills training provided to all staff;
 - Competency development in delivery of core programs through group supervision and videotaped sessions;
 - Additional training in specific core programs will be scheduled in the coming fiscal year, and;
 - Clear identification of deliverables and expectations for referrals to programming and program facilitation.
- This strategy also illustrates one of the measures being undertaken by Yukon Corrections to better support probation officers in their roles as core program providers.

Offender Management

The Department is not adequately managing many aspects of community supervision.

- In responding to the audit report's findings with respect to the enforcement of court-ordered conditions, Yukon Corrections has actively addressed this item through the completion of risk/needs assessments for all offenders that inform the development of detailed case management plans.
- The Department has also taken measures to increase community capacity for correctional services and programming in Yukon's remote communities.
- The audit report outlined a need for increased support for probation officers.
- The Department has recently hired a supervisor to provide more support to staff. The role of the supervisor is to facilitate a collaborative and continuous team approach to offender case management. The supervisor is also responsible for coaching staff and facilitating training. Ongoing monitoring and quality assurance for policy compliance is another important aspect of the supervisor's duties.
- With respect to corrections and probation officer training, the department will continue its practice of engaging staff in the

development of a yearly training schedule and focus specific attention on identifying individual training needs in probation officer performance plans.

- All initiatives will include mandatory staff involvement and documentation of the officer's participation.
- In order to provide better access to core rehabilitative programs outside of Whitehorse, we are currently re-allocating two unstaffed Whitehorse-based probation officer positions and dedicating them to Dawson City and Watson Lake. These probation officers will also travel to nearby communities to provide offender supervision and to deliver core programming.
- This will serve to normalize case-loads between the Whitehorse-based probation officers and those in the communities. Dawson City and Watson Lake will now each have two probation officers to serve those communities and their surrounding areas as follows:
 - Dawson City will serve Old Crow, Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks, and Stewart Crossing.
 - Watson Lake will serve Ross River and Faro.
 - Whitehorse will continue to serve Teslin, Carcross, Haines Junction, Destruction Bay, Burwash Landing, and Beaver Creek.
- It is worth mentioning that the audit did not contemplate referrals to other programming available from service providers in the communities.

- Probation officers do make referrals to other resources when they are available, for example, First Nations counselling services. Referrals made to other programming are now being thoroughly documented.
- The training and quality assurance initiatives being implemented by Yukon Corrections are supporting probation officers in the delivery of core programming across all Yukon communities.
- The Report also identified Yukon's limited resources in terms of mental health and substance abuse programs and services.
- It is worth noting that Yukon Corrections does provide offenders with the opportunity to consult with a psychologist, a psychiatrist and makes referrals to third-party service providers where appropriate.
- All correctional officers receive training in an instruction program from Mental Health Commission of Canada called Mental Health First Aid.
- This program was designed to provide initial support to persons who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis.
- There is also a version of this program that is specifically catered to First Nations populations.
- All inmates continue to be provided with a mental health screen upon admission to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.

First Nations Culture

*The Department is not yet meeting its obligations under the **Corrections Act** to incorporate the cultural heritage and needs of Yukon First Nations into their programs and services.*

- As I noted before, the report on Yukon Corrections made recommendations with respect to providing correctional services and programming that reflect the culture and heritage of Yukon First Nations and to better meet the needs of offenders who are First Nation members.
- The Yukon First Nations History and Cultures training course was developed to meet Government of Yukon commitments and was made available to Corrections staff in Fall 2014.
- Since then, nearly all frontline correctional officers and probation officers have taken this training. Those who have not taken this course will do so by the end of the 2015/16 fiscal year.
- While there are still challenges in providing evidence-based core rehabilitative programming that is specifically sensitive to Yukon First Nations culture and heritage, the Department of Justice is committed to strategic planning that will see the implementation of this initiative over the next five years.

- The department continues to take steps toward incorporating Yukon First Nations heritage by embedding cultural practices into the fabric of corrections operations.
- In order to facilitate this need, an Elder Advisory Group exists to provide suggestions and advice on how First Nation culture can be recognized and embedded in all aspects of the operation of the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.
- The group provides valuable insight into trends and issues affecting First Nations communities and families across the territory.
- It should be noted that group members are not expected to be representatives or delegates of any specific organization or government, but the group's mandate is to share their traditional knowledge that can relate to the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of inmates at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.
- The Elder Advisory Group members also impart their knowledge of traditions and culture with the Corrections staff and also help to inform areas of Correctional Officer Basic Training.
- Yukon Corrections has a contract with the Council of Yukon First Nations to facilitate the sharing of information and has contracted a First Nations social worker to aid in program development and delivery dialogue.
- There is First Nations focused evidence-based core programming currently in place at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, but it is the intellectual property of other jurisdictions and it should be noted

that because the programs are copyrighted they cannot be changed without permission.

- The programming has been developed and evaluated with scientific rigour over many years. The programs have been evaluated as being effective with other First Nations populations and this was one of the criteria for the initial selection of the programs.
- Measures taken to ensure Yukon First Nations culture and heritage is represented at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre include:
 - Incorporating traditional foods into the menu;
 - Supporting the development and implementation of the Yukon First Nations Land-Based Healing Camp and referring offenders from the correctional centre and community to participate in the program whenever it is offered;
 - Increasing the availability of First Nations facilitators to provide cultural workshops such as: beading, drum making, carving, spirit rattles and handling hides;
 - Offering two First Nations language courses;
 - Partnering with the Yukon College to deliver the Heritage and Cultural Essential Skills to offenders;
 - Making smudge kits available on every unit and individual smudge kits available upon request by offenders;

- Incorporating some traditional medicines into Health Services, available upon request by offenders;
- Establishing a library of Yukon First Nations books for offenders (19 volumes currently); and
- Starting a video library project that involves the Elders talking about their clans, cultural practices and telling stories (two completed to date), with the goal of making these available to offenders on the televisions.

Facility Management

- In terms of the audit report's facility management component, no recommendations were made addressing the management of the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. The Report states at p. 17 that the new facility was designed and built to meet the current and future needs of Yukon Corrections.
- The Report also found (at pages 19 and 20) that the Department of Justice had taken steps to address recruitment and training challenges, as well as reliance on overtime, in terms of staffing at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.
- This measure included provisions to recruit First Nation and female correctional officers.

Concluding Comments

- Thank you for allowing me the time to address the Department of Justice's progress in meeting the Auditor General's recommendations.
- At this time, my colleagues and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.