

Inspection visits to open prisons

On 3 February 2020, advisers to the Chancellor of Justice carried out an unannounced inspection visit to the open prison of Viru Prison. The advisers also carried out a short notice inspection visit to the open prison of Tallinn Prison on 10 February 2020 and a short notice inspection visit to the open prison of Tartu Prison on 28 February 2020.

Advisers to the Chancellor of Justice talked to the prisoners and officers of the open prison and took a tour of the prison's premises. Random document checks were also carried out.

General conditions and the internal atmosphere of the open prisons left a good overall impression. Officers of the open prison of Tallinn Prison and the female prisoners suggested that the environment in the women's ward of the prison was tense. A prisoner, who was also a mother, was especially concerned, stating that women have also yelled and said mean things to her child in the course of conflict situations and the mother was afraid that her child may be assaulted. Immediately after the visit's conclusion, advisers to the Chancellor of Justice requested that the women's ward be put under more careful monitoring and that the prison should help with de-escalating the tensions present in the ward.

Regardless of the recommendations that the Chancellor of Justice submitted to the Ministry of Justice and the prisons in 2016, prisoners in open prisons still do not have access to a computer or the Internet and cannot use a mobile phone outside the prison. Cutting people off from the digital world is not helpful to fostering norm-compliant conduct and helping prisoners cope with daily life after serving their sentence. This is also does not save any time for the prison service.

A decision to carry out a strip search must be based on a threat assessment, which in turn is based on the conduct of a specific prisoner.

Prisoners' access to health care services would become simpler and time and resources would be saved if the prisoners did not have to leave their respective departments for less complicated medical procedures and an appropriately furnished room would be set up in the building of the open prison.

The female prisoners of the open prison of Tartu Prison should be able to exercise in the prison yard. Furthermore, consideration should be given to placing more play items suitable for children of different age groups in the yard area of the open prison of Tallinn Prison.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the prisons must consider changing the organisation of providing food to the prisoners in the open prison so as to avoid excessive food waste in the open prisons and to ensure that the organisation of providing meals supports the independent coping skills of the open prison's prisoners.

The prisons must ensure that the prison staff are able to spend their work breaks in a rest area which has been specifically furnished to that end.