

St. Patrick's Institution Visiting Committee Annual Report 2015

I was appointed to the Visiting Committee for St Patrick's Institution just prior to the summer of 2015. Minister Frances Fitzgerald made the appointment. I was honoured and indeed excited to be selected for such an important and challenging position.

As St. Patrick's Institution is in a semi state of closure I am the only member of the Committee. I have been constantly supported and helped by Simon Walsh of the Irish Prison Service to whom I pay tribute at this juncture. I have assumed the role of Chairperson of the Committee in the absence of any other members thus the writing of this very brief report.

I attended a meeting of Chairpersons in Brian Stack House Portlaoise in October and spoke about my situation. There was unanimous agreement that it was very unsatisfactory but as St Patrick's was in a state of "semi closure" they understood the reasoning behind the lack of committee members.

That said, I did perform my duties on a monthly basis and indeed attended the Institution on other occasions to speak with staff and indeed the Governor John Kavanagh whom I found to be most engaging, dedicated and extremely effective in his position.

My monthly visits were very regular and I found them most enjoyable and I hope of some help to the inmates.

The most inmates present at one time when I called was three. On most other visits I found one or maybe two inmates present. To a person they expressed satisfaction with their treatment and seemed very secure and settled in their incarceration.

I must pay tribute to the staff at St. Patrick's Institution at this juncture for their efficiency and courtesy at all times. Ms Cahill, whom I met on virtually all the visits exudes an air of calm and control with her clients at all times. She treats them in a very motherly and respectful manner which I found most endearing.

There was general positivity from the inmates when we talked about conditions in St Patrick's Institution and a general reluctance to be moved to another facility. Most of the inmates that I dealt with were on remand. There was one inmate I met with three times but otherwise it was just the one encounter.

I believe that the model that St Patrick's is based on is a very good and worthwhile one. I have nothing but praise and respect for the people who work there.

I think that there needs to be some clarity and certainty about the future of the Institution. I do not believe that members of the Visiting Committees should be utilised prior to experiencing the most basic of training. I also believe that there should be continuity from one committee to the one that succeeds it.

And finally I want to state my willingness to continue in the Visiting Committee role be it in St Patrick's or indeed some other facility.

Is mise le meas,

Pat Burke Walsh