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Visiting Committee Annual Report End 2015

We, the undersigned members of Wheatfield Place of Detention Visiting Committee are pleased to present the Annual Report year ending 2015. The Visiting Committee comprises of four members at the time of this report being compiled. The committee visits the prison on the second Tuesday of every month, with two members of the committee conducting the follow up visits generally two weeks later. There has also been an unannounced visit to the institution to review its operations. The Committee has met Campus Governor Martin O'Neill and we will engage with him throughout the year.

Every month the committee has met with prisoners to hear their concerns. These meetings usually take place in the boardroom where prisoners are brought up and the meeting takes place in private with the committee. If for operational reasons prisoners can't be brought to the boardroom then the committee may visit the prisoners in their cells. The Committee has access to any part of the facility. The committee has met with a large amount of prisoners this year. The amount of prisoners requesting meetings with the committee ranges from month to month, with an average of approximately five prisoners per month. When the meeting with the prisoners has been concluded the committee then would meet with the Governor in which the prisoners' concerns and requests would be raised. Having given the Governor time to review the requests, two members of the committee would return to the institution that month and pass on the results of the requests to the prisoners. These meetings would usually take place within Wheatfield, whereby further inspection of the institution can take place.

Common requests from prisoners usually include: transfer requests, visitor issues, 23 hour lockup, P19 punishments and health issues. We have had some enquires regarding prisoners being told that they are subject to deportation orders when this has not been the case. The response from the Governor regarding the prisoners' requests is fair and accommodating. Where issues can be resolved they usually are. There are some instances due to operational reasons that some requests cannot be met. Prisoners generally understand the answers to

their requests. With some cases it is simply a breakdown in the communication channels that causes their concerns and can be quickly resolved.

Wheatfield Place of Detention is a well-run facility that is in need of modernisation. The institution is classed as a place of detention for adult males and sentenced seventeen year old juveniles. It has an occupational capacity of 540.

Prisoner cells:

Prisoner's cell conditions depend largely on which regime the prisoner finds himself on. If a prisoner is on basic regime his cell will more than likely be in poor condition. Windows are broken causing issues in summer and winter. The in cell mirrors are usually broken and there is a lot of graffiti on the walls or ceiling. If a prisoner finds himself on enhanced regime, the cells are in a much better state of repair. Prisoners have access to television, books, and magazines and also have facilities for tea and coffee etc. All cells have in cell sanitation. A programme of changing the type of windows within some cells will be undertaken in the near future. Prisoners are allowed to decorate their cells with photos and posters; some choose to display their educational certs. The beds and mattresses are adequate.

Facility corridors, wings and landings:

The general condition of the communal areas of the facility is good. There is a painting programme underway. It has greatly improved the landings where it has been done. Some prisoners are detailed with cleaning duties and the communal areas are well maintained. Some prisoners discard their refuse out of the cell windows and this creates an unsightly mess below the cell windows. There has been an increase in dumping from windows since last year. There is also health issues involved as this practice can attract vermin. There are no issues to report with regard to heating in these areas. The tuck shop has now set prices across all institutions and uses a form system which works well. Funds which the prisoner has access to may be spent on goods. i.e. tobacco, snacks, fruit and personal hygiene products among other items.

Prisoner Reception Area:

When a prisoner arrives at Wheatfield he is processed through the prisoner reception area in accordance with prison regulations. All personal articles are recorded. These articles are then kept in safe locker storage by the authorities. On arrival facility approved clothes can be issued to prisoners. These clothes are of good quality. The prisoner will be issued with personal hygiene products also. Upon release the prisoner's personal articles are returned to him. There have been some issues regarding Prisoners' personal effects going missing. If items go missing more should be done to locate items or compensate for missing items.

Prisoner Committal area:

After the prisoner is processed at the reception area he will then be brought to the committal wing in which he will spend his first night. While he is here he will be given the

prison rules and his entitlements will be explained to him. Some inmates have claimed not to have received this information. It is here where the prisoners and authorities decide what area of the institution is best suited for the inmate. The committee feel this is a positive move in reducing the stress for inmates arriving to the facility. It also helps the authorities in their prison management.

Facility Grounds:

The Facility has utilised its internal grounds well. It has developed a very high quality flower and plant nursery. It also gives some good training to the prisoners involved in the scheme. The prisoners involved in this programme are prisoners serving life on enhanced regime. A link has been established with local community groups i.e. Clondalkin Tidy Towns group in which Wheatfield supplies flowers for public areas of the community. The programme operates at a very professional level. The programme uses recycled rain water for this programme. The grounds are always well maintained. A substantial waste management programme operates within the prison. A programme of training assistive dogs has begun and seems to be going well.

Kitchen/Catering:

The kitchen operates at a very high level. There is a 28 day menu cycle in operation. This gives the prisoners a wide variety in foods and meals. Special care is taken as to ensure that the menu is both healthy and nutritious. Special dietary requirements are also taken into consideration. If a prisoner requires a specialist food the prison has stated that it would get it in. The kitchens are well suited and utilised for training prisoners in catering. The kitchen staff are highly motivated and are proud of their work. The kitchens and its stores operate at a professional level. The kitchens have been audited and inspected by outside authorities and have received the relevant accreditation. The committee have received no complaints about the quality of the food. The committee has also had meals prepared in the kitchens and have found them to be of good quality. The skills learned in the kitchen have a beneficial value upon the prisoner's release. Inmates call to kitchen distribution areas to collect their meals. There have been some issues regarding budgetary cut backs on food. The Kitchen has adapted well and complaints about food have dramatically fallen.

Education:

The Facility operates many educational and training services. Upon committal prisoners are encouraged to enter the educational programme. There are many levels in which to enter the educational units from some basic training all the way up to Open University levels. There is general basic education, Fetac Level 3, 4 and 5. Junior and Leaving Certificates. The Level depends on the subject. Many prisoners seem to have some literacy issues so it is important to identify any prisoners with literacy issues or dyslexia as some of these prisoners decide not to enter the educational process. The Visiting Committee feels that it would be appropriate to assess all 17-18 year olds to identify issues such as ADHD, Dyslexia

etc. Courses in anger management and empathy would also be of assistance to the 17-18 year old inmates. The educational staff is dedicated and hard working. They try hard to make the educational facility stimulating and rewarding. The staff achieves success in both. The educational facility is a safe environment in which the prisoners can utilise the facility. Bullying, violent and threatening behaviour is not tolerated within the facility and prisoners that engage in negative behaviour are removed. Prisoners are assessed to ascertain what level of education is best suited for him. There are a wide variety of courses in which prisoners can engage including choices from maths, business, computers, health education, creative arts and crafts, history, geography, sociology and languages. The committee feels that the education programme could always do with more resources especially to engage those inmates with literacy difficulties who do not enter the educational programmes. The number of inmates with poor literacy skills is still high. Provisions need to be looked at to address the current situation.

Library:

Wheatfield Place of Detention has a library for inmate usage. The library service has improved since last year as inmates have had more access. It is an important resource within Wheatfield and can be used to address the literacy issues.

Training Workshops:

The long term plan for Wheatfield is to return it to a training institution. On inspection the committee found the workshop training units to be of a highly professional level. The facility includes carpentry, metal, construction, printing and paint workshops. The instructors are dedicated and proud of their work and facility. Prisoners receive a high level of training and skill sets upon completion of courses. These facilities have a substantial array of tools and machines in which prisoners can carry out their work. The prison has also linked up with external groups i.e. charities in which some of the products and services of prisoners can be utilised. The skills learned in these facilities can be of great benefit to prisoners upon release. It is also a very stimulating and rewarding environment in which prisoners can achieve personal growth. The committee believes that it is important that the prison continue to receive the resources in which to carry out these training workshops. We also feel that these facilities are maintained to a very high level. It was also noted that high level of importance was placed on health and safety. The new training wing is almost ready for use and should be opened as soon as possible as there have been some unforeseen delays. Workshops can be closed due to staff shortages.

Physical Activities:

The committee believe that the Facility has a very good level of physical activities. The inmate's gyms have a good selection of equipment in which prisoners can train. The gyms are a very popular pastime in which prisoners participate. It is important that these pieces of equipment are kept maintained. Prisoners on basic enhancements get a minimum of one

hour per week and those on enhanced get a minimum of two hours per week. The Facility has an all-weather playing pitch which is a well utilised asset. There is also a sports hall in which prisoners can play sports such as indoor soccer, badminton, among others. The institutions authorities have a positive approach to physical activity. The committee believes that fit and healthy prisoners would be less of a burden on the prison health service.

Facility yards:

The institutions yards are large spaces with good natural light. They are covered with netting in order to stop objects thrown from outside the prison into the yards. Security procedures are also put in place to ensure that weapons are not brought into the yards. The committee understands that drugs are being thrown from outside the prison walls onto the netting where the prisoners retrieve the packages by throwing objects up at the netting to release the packages. More netting above the yards is required to help combat drugs coming over the walls.

Laundry:

Wheatfield's laundry service is a large facility. It handles all of Wheatfield and Cloverhill prison laundry requirements. It is a modern facility that gives prisoners some good training opportunities while also cutting down some operational costs for the institution. On inspection the laundry is a busy well used service that acts in a very professional manner. The committee received no reports or issues from inmates regarding this service.

Prisoner Mail:

Prisoner mail service is generally handled with efficiency. Prisoner mail incoming/outgoing mail is censored for inappropriate remarks, comments and material. Prisoners can receive private mail from legal personnel if it is in a separate envelope within the original post. An option is available to send personal or sensitive mail direct to the Visiting Committee. Generally the inmates are content with the system as. Inmates should be given the full postal/contact details of the Prison. The committee had no issues regarding inmate's mail this year.

Discipline Regimes:

The institution operates three levels of incentivised regimes, basic, standard & enhanced. All new committals enter as standard. Depending on their engagement with the system, their regime could be downgraded to basic. Within the basic programme there are a loss of certain privileges such as, no access to, the gym, games consoles, family visits, premium employment and premium accommodation among other privilege losses. The authorities

have implemented this regime to prisoners not engaging with the system. The committee believes the loss of these privileges is fair. It should be noted that the loss of these privileges should be administered to all in a fair and equitable way. Clear prison rules and discipline guidelines are given to all prisoners. This regime should never be used on prisoners without giving the prisoner a clear indication of his infringement.

Prisoners who meet the more challenging standards are rewarded by being upgraded to the enhanced regime. There are clear advantages to being on the enhanced regime such as, up to 7 hours out of cell per day, more gym access, more visits and phone calls. The main privilege is that the enhanced regime is based in the new wing of the facility. This is very sought after as conditions in the new wing are superior. The inmates feel safer and more comfortable in the new wing. The cells are superior and the wing has a better design layout than the original part of the prison. Prisoners have to have entered the enhanced regime before they would be considered for movement to an open prison or T.R. This regime should never be taken away from an inmate without clear indication of his infringement. The committee believes that the usage of the different incentive regimes is a fair system once it is administered in a fair and equitable way. Clear communication between the institutions authorities and the inmates are of importance for this system to work effectively. It is important the all prisoners are aware of prison punishment procedures and the prisoners understand the ramifications of infringing the rules.

Inmates can receive P19 punishments for breaking of rules within Wheatfield. The P19 involves a loss of privileges for a designated period of time. The committee does not feel that the P19 punishment is over used with Wheatfield Place of Detention. It should be noted that the committee feel that a clear explanation of why the prisoner has received the P19 should be given. There is an appeal process within the system whereby the Governor can make an overriding decision. There are further channels to which a prisoner can appeal a punishment. This involves the report being sent to the IPS for a decision. The committee feel that it can take too long for the IPS to rule on a complaint or appeal. The committee recommends that this appeal process should take no longer than three days and have some transparency and continuity with regard to who is making these decisions.

Other incentives used to reward good behaviour include the opportunity to be moved to an open prison. The committee feel that this is one of the best incentive tools that the prison has. There should be clear and regular communication to Wheatfield as to the availability of places within these facilities. Prisoners should be moved quite soon after they have been approved. The committee feels that the awarding of places for inmates with 24 months or more left on their sentence is counterproductive as prisoners on enhanced regime who have applied for open prison with 18 months or less that have not been moved feel aggrieved, angry and disillusioned with the institution. The practice causes friction for otherwise well behaved prisoners. The prison has been implementing a T.R. programme and a community return programme. The committee feel that these are positive steps.

Institution Visits:

Inmates are entitled to at least one and a maximum of three visits per week depending on the regime that they are currently on. Wheatfield visits are one of the main gateways that

drugs and other illegal items enter the institution. The authorities apply high security measures to prevent this. Institution visitors check in in a reception area outside the prison and then wait to be called. St. Vincent De Paul are now operating a visitors centre in this area. It has been well received by visitors. The waiting area is clean with plenty of seating. There are lockers for visitors to place their personal belongings in. At busy times the large lockers seem to be used more than the small ones. The lockers must be kept in a good state of repair with working locks. Visitors then enter the institution through the security measures such as X-ray and sniffer dogs. If a visitor is caught with drugs the Gardaí are informed. The dogs are an important tool in the control of drugs. Should a dog indicate on a visitor then after a search the visit will take place behind glass screens. The committee believe that the dog unit has undergone a retraining programme and more dogs will come on stream in the future. The visiting area is well maintained but when it is full and both sections are in use it can be difficult for people to hear properly as the acoustics are poor. A plan to use the newer visits area for table visits is due to be introduced to Wheatfield for enhanced prisoners, there are family rooms that some prisoners have access to. The committee feel that if a visitor receives a ban on visits clear guidelines should be issued to inform the visitor and the inmate of how long the ban is and the protocol to have the ban lifted. There should be some compassion if a visitor has a genuine reason for being late.

Visits that are suspected for wrongdoing are reviewed by CCTV and a decision is generally made after the visit. The visiting process takes up a large amount of staffing resources as prisoners have to be brought up from all parts of the institution. This can take some time for officers to get from one end of Wheatfield to the other. If a prisoner is suspected of receiving anything illegal, they are searched in a private holding room. The committee believes that the institutions authorities are operating the visiting area to a fair and high standard. However there have been some issues raised with us regarding visits. The visiting area continues to be the preferred way of getting drugs into Wheatfield. The Committee still feels that bringing in children that are not related to inmates should be reviewed. There are only two Officers observing live visits. In order to really tackle the drugs issue, this number should increase. The booking line has improved from the last few years. The use of an online form to book family visits is now available via the IPS website. If a visitor is barred, clear and fair timeframes should be implemented. The paperwork for future visits should be issued at least one week before the expiration of the previous paperwork. Visitor review results should be communicated to the inmate in question. The family rooms should be used as often as they are available.

It should be noted that the authorities are addressing the external appearance of the public areas. The car parks have undergone a large scale clean up and landscaping with plants and flowers from the institution. This gives a better impression to visitors upon arrival. Due to budgetary restraints the external appearance standards are starting to drop. The public car park is free and has plenty of spaces. It is an unsecured car park and there have been issues of cars broken into. Overall the visiting area works well and the visitors arriving have no major problems with the process.

Health:

The inmates have access to doctors, nurses, dentists, and opticians. If a prisoner requires emergency treatment it is provided for them. As far as check-ups go prisoners are entitled to the same frequency of care as that would be provided in the public system. Inmates receive fair treatment and follow ups as required in accordance with best practice. The committee believes that all prisoners who avail of the medical services receive good care. It is important that the prison authorities are aware of inmates that have on-going conditions that may develop into different conditions. It is important that communication lines between inmates, medical staff and the institutions authorities are kept open and clear. Clear dialogue and protocol is required in order to stop inmates trying to or being accused of storing medication. It is important that the medical and prison staff deal with potential emergency issues promptly and keep inmates informed of the status of their condition

There is an issue regarding inmates looking to see the psychologist as there is a back log in prisoners requiring their services. Prisoners seem very happy with the service and seem to have a good relationship with the staff. This department is an integral part of prisoners health care as the stresses of prison life can be difficult for some to overcome

Wheatfield also accommodates addiction counselling for inmates. Wheatfield also runs a building better lives programme for selected inmates. This course is a very successful course in their mental healthcare. The possibility of expanding versions of this course should be considered.

Chaplaincy:

The institutions chaplaincy is an integral part of inmate welfare. They administer the inmate's spiritual needs. This service also assists inmates with family issues and other personal matters. It is an important line of communication that inmates have and should be protected. They work hard to provide a caring and trusting service for inmates.

Wheatfield has also made provisions for inmates of different faiths. As Wheatfield has a number of inmates with different faiths, these provisions need to be monitored and upgraded if necessary. The committee has received no issues of concern regarding this department this year.

Drugs:

Drugs in Irish prisons are an on-going concern and Wheatfield Place of Detention is no exception. The institutions authorities implement a strict policy on drugs in accordance with the IPS drug strategy. Visitors to Wheatfield are subjected to scanners, searches, sniffer dogs, and their bags are subject to X-Rays. Prison visits are monitored by cctv for review at a later stage. The institutions yards are covered with netting to prohibit articles being thrown

from the perimeter walls. Wheatfield's authorities take the detection of drugs seriously; prisoners can be subjected to urine tests for the purpose of changing a regime. Drug free landings are on offer to prisoners who wish to avail, but drugs still end up on these landings. The committee feels that drug free landings are an important part of this strategy. We also feel that under no circumstances should prisoners that have not been cleared for these landings end up here. Vulnerable prisoners and visitors can be bullied and threatened to bring in drugs. With all the precautions put in place, drugs still enter the prison system. The visiting area seems to be the weakest area as it is often busy and understaffed.

Prisoners can avail of drug rehabilitation programmes within the prison and the authorities encourage prisoners to use this service. The use of drugs in the prison causes a lot of difficulties. The committee feel that the institutions authorities should continue their hard work in the eradication of drugs from Wheatfield. The HSE provide services in addiction counselling. Drugs in the prison have a destructive effect on the lives of inmates. Of the many inmates the committee has seen over the year drugs have been an issue within their life at some stage. The committee believe that the institutions authorities battle against drugs within Wheatfield should get all the resources they require in which to continue their work. A new confidential phone line to report drugs in the prison has been set up and is a welcome addition in the battle against drugs.

23 Hour Lock Up:

Prisoners who find themselves on 23 hour lock up undergo a tough prison experience. While it is understandable that it may be necessary to use 23 hour lock ups for certain prisoners, voluntary 23 hour lock ups should be only used as a last resort. Upon meeting inmates on 23 hour lock up, it is clear that the pressures, stresses and monotony of prison life are intensified. The committee believes that the mental health care of these prisoners be prioritised. Wheatfield Place of Detention has a number of inmates on 23 hour lock up and the committee feel that the prison authorities do try to encourage prisoners to come off this regime.

St Patricks Transfers:

With the partial closure of St. Patrick's institution, a portion of these inmates have been moved to Wheatfield Place of Detention. They are segregated from the main inmate population. Wheatfield's Management has done an excellent job in preparing the segregated area.

Institution Violence:

Prisoner violence and attacks are decreasing within the institution. The authorities have implemented weapon amnesties to remove these articles from Wheatfield. The committee believes that it is this kind of progressive approach to prison violence that is providing the

positive results within Wheatfield. The institution's staff and authorities take violence and attacks in Wheatfield very seriously and inmate safety is high on their list of priorities.

Other Services/Facilities

Wheatfield has links with external groups such as the Red Cross and The Samaritans. These provide an excellent service for prisoners to engage in. In certain areas of Wheatfield the Samaritans have trained inmates to become listeners. This is a very valuable resource as inmates have somebody to talk to should they be experiencing a problem. Prisoners have access to games consoles, tv, and playing cards among other items. The committee has had no reports of issues regarding prisoners' personal funds. There is an official complaints procedure set up to facilitate prisoner complaints. This should be reviewed and amended to keep it relevant.

Sentence Management:

Wheatfield operates an integrated sentence management programme. There is a dialogue between the institution and the inmates on how to get the best out of their time inside. This gives the inmates a clear understanding of their future within the prison. The authorities have a positive approach regarding sentencing. The committee feel that Wheatfield's authorities work hard to ensure that prisoners on enhanced regimes get an opportunity to apply for T.R. or open facilities. The committee feel that Wheatfield's authorities operate a fair and humane approach to prisoner sentences. The committee believe that if a prisoner has a request for information or transfers etc., that when the Governor receives this request it is followed through to a conclusion by that same Governor thus avoiding duplication and misinformation. The lines of communication must be open and clear at all times.

Conclusion:

Wheatfield Place of Detention has faced many challenges in the last few years. The economic cut backs, have taken a toll on both staff and inmates, but through hard work and good management, Wheatfield has remained an excellent institution. More investment is required to develop Wheatfield further. Staffing levels need to be looked at as the institution suffers when staff members are away on escorts etc. Governor Kavanagh is well respected by the inmates and he is a positive influence on the institution. As discussed earlier, clear communication lines between the staff and inmates should be maintained.

We, Wheatfield Place of Detention Visiting Committee wish to thank Governor Mr Patrick Kavanagh, his colleagues and all the staff at Wheatfield Place of Detention for their support and cooperation throughout the year. The Wheatfield Visiting Committee will continue its work for the coming year 2016

Mr Stewart Stephens (Chairman)

Mrs Kathleen Gill

Mrs Brenda Coyne

Mr. Joe Fitzsimons