

**Minister Dermot Ahern  
Dept. Of Justice, Equality & Law Reform  
94 St Stephens Green  
Dublin 2  
15 December 2010**

**Dear Minister,**

**Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to present its Annual report for the year 2010.**

### **Introduction:**

The Committee meet each month on the first Thursday of the month. The meetings were well attended. Visits were undertaken by two members of the committee who were nominated monthly. They conducted detailed and comprehensive tours of the prison. The committee welcomed the new committee member Ms M Scanlon.

### **Staffing Levels:**

The Committee had a full and frank meeting with the Director General Mr B Purcell regarding the staffing levels in Castlerea Prison. The Committee put forward the case for Castlerea prison to increase the number of staff in Castlerea Prison, the Director could not make an exception for one prison he had to look at the staffing levels within the country. Further to this meeting the Committee wrote a letter to the Minister regarding the staffing levels. The workshop area of the prison is suffering due to staff redeployment within the prison, the Committee is aware that the Governor has no choice but to close these workshops but feel that the prisoners working in this area are not able to attend work due to these closures.

### **Retirement of Staff:**

The retirement of senior staff was of great concern to the Committee and the experience the prison has lost, we wish all these staff the best of health and enjoyment in their retirement. We wish the young staff that have transferred into Castlerea the very best of luck in Castlerea prison.

### **Attempted Suicides:**

The media is very quick to publish suicides in custody but the Committee would like to express its gratitude to the staff involved in saving the attempted suicides in custody and we know from speaking to these offenders that they are grateful to the staff involved.

### **Prisoners before the committee**

In addition to the offenders that the committee have met in the course of their visits to the prison there were some written requests and several offenders requested to meet the entire committee. All cases were discussed at length and the relevant course of action taken. The small number of offenders requesting to see the committee is taken as an indication of how well the prison is being run.

### **Surgery:**

The local GP attends Monday to Saturday and at any other time once called to the prison. The level of care offered to prisoners in Castlerea is second to none, the Committee is fully aware how much extra pressure is placed on the staff in this area with the increase in the numbers in custody, with all the services available to persons in custody i.e. dentist etc. The new refurbishment in the surgery is a welcome development giving the medical staff more space and privacy when dealing with prisoners and their medical needs.

### **Chaplaincy:**

The great work carried out by lay chaplain Margaret Connaughton continues in Castlerea whereby she co-ordinates mass with the local Parish Priest and with any other needs of other religious denominations. She also does great work in dealing with family bereavements of offenders, and the committee would like to thank her for doing this very difficult task so professionally.

### **School Area:**

The work done in the school area once again is to be commended with a very high level of interest in the classes provided, with some classes been over subscribed. The various levels of exams also with prisoners taking on the leaving cert, junior cert and taking part in the Open University.

### **Kitchen:**

Here the prison provide a wide range of training within a production kitchen. This training ranges from elementary cookery (Leonardo) to Professional Cookery under the National Apprenticeship Programme. In addition to this the kitchen is operated to the highest standards and currently holds the Emerald Award from Excellence Ireland. With 15 prisoners working in this area and gives these prisoners valuable employment within the prison.

### **Tuck Shop:**

The Prison Tuck Shop is a resounding success. It supplies a large array of items for Prisoners to purchase. It also supplies newspapers to allow prisoners to stay in touch with current affairs. The staff can also arrange for special purchases with the permission of the Governor. It is noted by the Committee that the staff working in this area are extremely busy with nearly 400 prisoners looking for the tuck shop on a weekly basis.



### **Waste Management:**

In line with our commitment to environmental issues we provide the best possible training in waste management. We are in the process of introducing HETAC accreditation for this training. We are currently leaders in the implementation of composting techniques and are almost cost neutral in the management of all our other waste. 15 offenders currently work in this area.

### **Comparative Visit:**

The Committee was grateful for a comparative visit to the Dochas Centre and the great work undertaken within the confines of the prison. This visit made the Committee aware of the wonderful space that Castlerea has within the grounds for future development.

### **Facilities Required:**

We are very aware of the current climate but feel attention is required in the following area's:

(1) Upgrade of visiting box in the main prison. This facility was in place when there were 120 in custody but with the numbers now closer to 400 this is no longer fit for purpose. Family visits form a major part of the rehabilitation of offenders were contact with their family is very important to them.

(2) Upgrade of laundry facility. This is not able to operate for the numbers in custody and again the Committee would like to thank the staff working in this area.

### **Conclusion:**

The committee was very concerned in relation to the staffing levels in Castlerea Prison (as outlined above). Once again this year the members of the committee feel that Castlerea is a very well run prison with very professional and courteous staff. The committee would like to acknowledge the courtesy and help extended to them by the Governor and Staff over the last year.

# Visiting Committee Members

## Annual Report 2010

MR M NEVIN	<u>Michael Nevin</u>
MR L MC ENTIRE	<u>Luis McEntire M.C.C.</u>
MRS KILGANNON	<u>Jeannus Kilgannon</u>
MR M DALY	<u>Marin Daly</u>
MR E BRADY	<u>Edward Brady</u>
MR S KELLY	<u>Seamus Kelly P.C.</u>
MS M DARCY	<u>Mary D'Arcy</u>
MR P GREANEY	<u>Peter Greaney</u>
MS M SCANLON	<u></u>
MR M LEONARD	<u>Mark Leonard</u>
MR F FITZSIMMONS	<u>Francis Fitzsimons</u>