

# **Limerick Prison Visiting Committee**

## **Annual Report 2010**

We the members of Limerick Prison Visiting Committee are pleased to present our annual report. The committee held monthly meetings in conjunction with interim meetings and other visits to the prison. We met with individual prisoners, both male and female at various locations throughout the Prison. The following is a list of the issues which were of concern to offenders and which were discussed at the meetings:

1. Lost Property,
2. Loss of privileges/restoration of lost remission,
3. Temporary Release applications,
4. Offenders' visitors being denied access to the prison under the new search procedures,
5. Transfer of offenders to other prisons and places of detention ,
6. General complaints,

### **Healthcare**

The Committee had identified in our 2009 report, certain issues in relation to healthcare. We are pleased to report that we have noticed a marked improvement in the context of fewer prisoners presenting with medical/medication issues.

### **Female Prison**

The committee is pleased to note the provision of the extra accommodation in the female wing, increasing the capacity of the wing from 20 to 34. However we strongly recommend that where possible, in the interest of offenders' welfare and privacy, that

all cells in the female wing should be maintained as single occupancy units.

### **Infrastructural Projects**

The committee has on numerous occasions, highlighted the issue of the necessary provision of in-cell sanitation on A and B wings of the prison. We regret to report that no work has been undertaken in relation to the provision of in-cell sanitation on these wings. **We again call on the Irish Prison Service to act on the provision of in-cell sanitation as a matter of urgency.**

### **Catering**

The members of the committee visited the prison kitchen on many occasions during the year. Yet again, we were very impressed and pleased with the continuing high catering standards, the quality of the food and the high standard of cleanliness.

### **Screening/Search Procedures**

The committee is happy to report that the screening and search procedures are working well and are contributing effectively to the reduction of contraband entering the prison.

### **Psychiatric Service**

**The members of the Visiting Committee again reiterate that imprisonment should not be used for persons who are suffering from mental illness and those who would be better treated in a community setting.** The committee is aware that some offenders committed to prison, have psychiatric problems and should be treated at facilities where the necessary treatment/counselling is available. Imprisonment is not a suitable alternative to addressing these issues. We also again recommend that continued treatment should be made available to offenders with mental health issues, post release from prison.

### **Visit to Loughan House.**

On the 6th September, the committee visited Loughan House and held their monthly meeting there. On conclusion of the meeting, the members of the committee were given a tour of the prison. The committee wishes to convey their appreciation to the Governor and staff of Loughan House for the hospitality shown to them and for a very enjoyable and informative visit. Such visits to other prisons and places of detention offer visiting committees a chance to observe how other institutions are operated and to advise on any positive procedures which might be advantageous to the management of their respective prisons.

### **Employment/Education.**

The committee visited the education unit and the prison workshops on a number of occasions and are pleased to see that there are substantial numbers of offenders attending the school. The provision of education to prisoners is very important and is indeed vital in order to increase the chances offered to prisoners on their release from custody. We support the principle of offenders being employed within the prison and compliment the Governor, staff, teachers and instructors involved in the education and instruction of prisoners. However, it was obvious to the members during our visits, that due to the scarcity of resources/staff, all of the available workshops were not being utilised.

### **Persons committed to Limerick Prison on Fines**

We again highlight the fact that the numbers of people committed to prison for non-payment of fines remains excessively high. The committee are still of the opinion that an alternative to prison, such as the restorative justice scheme initiated by Judge Michael Reilly should be considered. As we stated in our last report, the committal to prison of persons for non-payment of fines are putting a huge strain on the resources and facilities at Limerick Prison.

## **Condolences**

The members wish to express our sincere sympathies to the families of staff, committee members and offenders who passed away during the last year.

The members of the Visiting Committee would like to express our thanks and gratitude to Governor O' Riordan and all the staff at Limerick Prison for their help and assistance throughout the year.

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**Chairman.**