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**Midlands Prison Visiting Committee.**

*Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform,  
Department of Justice,  
72-76 St Stephens Green,  
Dublin 2.*

*Dear Minister,*

**MIDLANDS PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2010**

*The Visiting Committee are pleased to present to you the Midlands Prison  
Annual Report for the year 2010.*

## **Annual Report 2010.**

*The function of our Visiting Committee to the Midlands Prison is to ensure that all prisoners are treated fairly and humanely and also with dignity and respect. On our many visits to the Prison during 2010 we listened to prisoner complaints, concerns and requests privately and in confidence. We raised all issues with the authorities at Governor Level and sought to bring all issues to a satisfactory conclusion. We are delighted to report that all Staff and Services working both within and visiting the prison carry out their work in a most professional manner and have the interest of prisoners welfare as paramount.*

### **Prisoners Requests:**

*The Committee met with thirty nine prisoners during the course of the year and listened to all issues. An example of issues and prisoner grievances read as follows:*

- *Visitors Searching*
- *Compulsory Inter-prison transfers*
- *Loss of Clothing*
- *Requests for escorted temporary release escorts for compassionate reasons*
- *Multiculturalism Difficulties*

**Visitor Searching:** *Some prisoners feel that the search dog is indicating on visitors without foundation. The committee are satisfied that the introduction*

*of the passive drug dog and the search unit has gone a long way towards helping keep drugs out of the prison.*

***Inter Prison Transfers:*** *Due to the high numbers in prison population, prisoners are often transferred to other prisons for operational reasons without requesting such transfer. Some deem this to be unfair as it can prove a burden on families for visitation purposes.*

*The committee are happy that in so far as is possible the management in the Midlands Prison try to facilitate all prisoners transfer requests as soon as is operationally possible.*

***Loss of Clothing:*** *Two instances were highlighted and resolved successfully.*

***Compassionate Temporary Release:*** *Prisoners have been facilitated with escorted visits to graveyards and funeral homes when possible.*

***Multiculturalism difficulties:*** *Due to the high numbers of Non-Nationals within the Prison System the Committee had received some complaints from Prisoners feeling they were discriminated against within the Prison. In consultation with Management the Committee are satisfied that this is not the case in the Midlands Prison.*

*The Committee are satisfied that the majority of issues presented to them throughout the year are resolved at a local level to their satisfaction and in most instances to the satisfaction of the prisoner.*

### **Visitors Booking System**

*On the Visiting Committees many visits to the Prison during the year some concerns were expressed to us regarding the difficulty that was presented to some of the prisoners families when pre booking their visits. On investigation we were informed of the situation as follows: An upgraded computer system was introduced during the year whereby Visiting Dockets are printed for each visit which greatly enhances the operation of this area for both staff and visitors. Unfortunately there is only one dedicated line for booking visits and visitors are often finding it impossible to get through to make their booking. The Committee understand that with the high numbers of prisoners being housed in the Midlands Prison that it is going to prove difficult.*

*The Committee would suggest that the telephone system should be upgraded to at least have an answering service to inform those ringing of the status of their call and maybe allow callers have the option of knowing where they are in a queuing system instead of getting an engaged tone each time they ring.*

### **Positive Sentence Management**

*Prisoner applications for temporary release and transfers continue to be considered on an ongoing basis. The Midlands Prison conduct a monthly review meeting with an Official from Prison Operations, Prison Governor and Heads of Function within the Prison to deal with daily requests. Unfortunately people are still being committed to Prison for the non payment of fines and the Midlands Visiting Committee would like to again stress that we feel that prison is not suitable for the purpose of recovering money owed in fines. The Management in the Midlands Prison ensure to transfer such prisoners to open centres as often as possible.*

### **Committee's Visit to other Prison**

*The Committee were delighted to be afforded the opportunity to visit Arbour Hill Prison and the New Courts of Criminal Justice Complex in October. We were delighted to meet with Arbour Hill's Visiting Committee and enjoyed a comprehensive tour of all the Workshops and facilities provided for the prison population at the prison. We would also like to commend the Kitchen and Catering Staff on the excellent presentation and service of food provided. In the afternoon the committee toured the Courts Complex and viewed the Holding Cell Areas and Court Rooms. We would like to compliment the Prison Staff involved in the day to day running of this complex and remark on the excellent facilities and layout of the building and commend those that were involved in the initial planning of such a complex.*

### **Meeting with the C.P.T**

*Mel Kelleher and Jennifer Murnane O'Connor had a meeting with two members of the C.P.T while they were in the Midlands Prison early in 2010.*

### **Director General's Meeting with Committee**

*The Visiting Committee welcomed Mr. Brian Purcell to their monthly meeting in October. These meetings are of great benefit to the committee and we find them to be very informative, productive and worthwhile and thank Mr. Purcell for his time.*

## **Ongoing Developments and New Initiatives**

### ***New Prison Building and Kitchen:***

*The Visiting Committee are delighted to hear that the contractors are in place and that work on this new prison building project will commence early in 2011. They feel it is much needed to alleviate the overcrowding and the pressure for prison spaces in the Midlands Prison and other prisons.*

### ***Health and Safety:***

*We would like to congratulate and compliment Governor Barclay and his staff on being accredited with the ISO 18001 Standard in Occupational Health & Safety award in November 2010. We acknowledge the effort and preparation involving all staff, heads of function and prisoners working together in the work place to achieve such a standard and great credit must be given to all involved especially in these current times of restricted budgets and staff shortages. The Committee also welcome further initiatives planned around the promotion of occupational health matters and health promotion going forward into 2011.*

### ***Environmental Waste Management Service:***

*2010 was once again a busy year for all Staff and prisoners involved in the operation of the Environmental Waste area. The Committee congratulate the Midlands Prison in again maintaining the 14001 Standard for the Environmental Management System. This certificate is an International Award certified by Certification Europe Ltd. Great credit is due to the Prison Management, Staff and Prisoners under the direction of Assistant Governor McCormack and her team on retaining this standard again in 2010. The Committee appreciate how difficult it is in these current times with the constraints on both Staff and Budgets and congratulate all involved in maintaining such a high standard*

### ***Medical Services:***

*The Midlands Prison Medical Services is led by two full time Doctors and a highly qualified nursing staff to care for the diverse needs of the prisoners. The Visiting Committee would like to extend their best wishes to Dr. Chris Owens on his retirement from his post in the Prison in November 2010. He provided an excellent service to all prisoners and staff during his years in the Midlands Prison.*

***Health Care Provision:***

*The Committee recognise the excellent services provided by the Health Care Staff in the Midlands Prison. 2010 saw a continued expansion of services available through the Health Care Unit. The Methadone Clinic was radically overhauled. Methadone dispensing was taken over by the Pharmacy Service and a dedicated methadone doctor was appointed for the prescribing and reviewing of all prisoners requiring methadone. There has been a significant reduction in the waiting lists for dental treatment through the provision of additional clinics. Additional Chiropody services were also introduced. Overall the Visiting Committee are pleased to see continued improvement in the Health Care Services provided in the Midlands Prison.*

***Lifers Group:***

*The Lifers group continues to look at ways of improving conditions for prisoners while encouraging the prisoners to engage with all the service providers and utilise all the services available. The Committee are delighted to see that the number of prisoners attending both the Work & Training and Educational facilities have increased significantly in 2010. This, they feel, is directly attributed to the work of the Lifers group and the commitment of both the Education and Work/Training Staff.*

*The introduction of Lifer's family visits has proven very successful and is seen as a very positive move in helping long term prisoners develop and maintain relationships with their families. The Visiting Committee would like to compliment the Librarian on introducing a new programme called "Story Book Dads" which allows prisoners to record stories onto a CD which can then be listened to by their young children. This venture has proven very popular with prisoners and their young families.*

***Catering/Kitchen Facilities***

*The Committee commend the quality of food and hygiene standards maintained at the Midlands Prison. The Kitchen continues to be a major source of employment for prisoners on an ongoing basis.*

***School/Education Facilities***

*The Visiting Committee recognise that the School Principal Ms. Linda Tynan and her Staff provide a wide and varied curriculum to cater for all the needs of the Prison Population. In line with the vocational focus of the education programme, there is a strong emphasis on personal development, literacy and basic skills and the acquisition of appropriate certification. The School have*

*an average weekly attendance of 275 students. We would like to congratulate 20 students on their success in the Leaving Certificate Exams in 2010 and a further 8 Students for successfully completing their Junior Certificate Examinations. The Visiting Committee would hope for a greater participation in Education and more prisoners taking exams. It has also come to their notice in their conversation with prisoners that some segregated prisoners do not have the same access to the Education facilities due to operational difficulties.*

### **Probation Service**

*During 2010 the committee were informed that the Probation Services resources were concentrated primarily on working with prisoners who have been Court ordered to be under Probation Service supervision on release. They have been busy preparing and completing risk assessments, case management plans and pre-release plans with all of the offenders with the main focus being on working with them to reduce their risk of re-offending. As the Midlands Prison is a satellite prison for sex offenders the Services time is mainly occupied with the supervision of many sex offenders on post release supervision. This year the Probation Service also forged links with two accommodation providers who will consider housing sex offenders on release. The Visiting Committee acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the Probation Service Staff in the Midlands Prison and are delighted to know that they have an excellent working relationship with outside agencies in order to secure placements for prisoners upon their release from custody.*

### **Chaplaincy**

*The Committee recognise the vital and important role of the Chaplain in the Midlands Prison. It is important to have the chaplains to look after the spiritual needs and to provide pastoral care for the prison community. They are also an important link with prisoners families while in custody and beyond.*

### **Death in Custody:**

*The Committee were informed of the death of a prisoner who was found in his cell by Staff on their routine check during evening recreation. The Visiting Committee would like to express their sincere sympathy to the family of the deceased and also to thank the Midlands Prison Management, Health Care Staff and Staff in their efforts to revive him.*

## **Conclusion**

*The Visiting Committee would like to extend their good wishes to all Staff who retired during the year. We would like to thank Governor Whelan and wish him well on his transfer to Mountjoy Prison. We welcome Governor Colm Barclay and look forward to working with him in the future. We also thank Governor John Malone and Governor Eddie Mullins who met with the Committee at meetings throughout the year. We thank Eileen Fennelly for her work as Secretary to the Committee during 2010.*

*Finally the Committee commend all Staff and Services working in the Midlands Prison for their continued commitment and dedication, sometimes in difficult circumstances and look forward to working with them again in 2011.*



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*Jennifer Murnane O'Connor*  
*Chairperson*

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*Jody Gunning*  
*Vice-Chairperson*

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*Jack Bourke*

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*Colm Wylie*

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*Brigid Teehey*

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*John Cronin*

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*Dr. Abdul Bulbulia*

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*Paddy Boland*

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*Nuala Halpin*

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*Mel Kelleher*