

Cork Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2007

The visiting committee met monthly with a high level of attendance and input to meetings by the members. Members met prisoners on meeting days and two members were available to meet prisoners between each meeting of the committee. Most requests to meet visiting committee members concerned:

1. Transfer between prisons for family reasons
2. Medical problems
3. Problems with other prisoners
4. Problems with staff

Members listened to problems and complaints and brought them to the governor's attention. The governor subsequently informed the committee of actions taken as a result of committee member's representation on behalf of prisoners.

Committee members visited the kitchen, laundry and workshops at various times during the year, and found these areas working well and to a high standard.

Overcrowding

There is a constant overcrowding problem in the prison and is a source of concern to the committee. **Incidents in the prison are frequently as a result of overcrowding.**

Educating, Training and Pre release

Prisoners have available a wide range of education, training and pre release courses. In 2007 more prisoners are availing of these courses.

Cell Accommodation

Cell accommodation is old and out dated, the availability of television and cell kettles has reduced tension in an over crowded prison. The lack of proper cell sanitation and the practise of slopping out is unacceptable in 2007. This has also been highlighted as unacceptable by the Committee For Prevention of Torture.

Drug Free Environment

The introduction of a sniffer dog to help in drug detection and the proposed introduction of x-ray equipment and increased screening of everybody entering the prison is a positive development.

Art and Craft Exhibition

A very successful art and craft exhibition of prisoners work took place in the prison in December, with most of the work being bought by invited guests.

A Visit to Limerick Prison

The committee visited Limerick prison in October and used the visit to see more modern prison facilities and compare various programmes.

Inspector of Prisons

Two members met Mr. Justice Dermot Kinlen and his assistant during his inspection of the prison and matters of concern to the committee were raised with him.

Mental Health Services

The committee wishes to express their concern at the difficulty in finding accommodation in the Central Mental Hospital when a prisoner becomes mentally ill. The present procedure where a prisoner is segregated and put under observation and has to wait quite often for a considerable length of time for a place in the Central Mental Hospital is not in accordance with best practise for mental health care and we urge an early review of this procedure.

The committee would like to see the recommendations of the expert group on mental health policy in relation to prisons and prisoners implemented, reference *A Vision for change. Published by the Dept. of Health and Children. Chpt.15.*

New Prison

The committee welcomes the proposals to replace Cork Prison with a new facility in north Cork.

"Your Equal Programme"

The committee welcomes the work being done by various agencies in this pilot programme which is a new and enlightened approach to prisoner reintegration and employment following release from prison.

Ministers Visit

The Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform Mr. Brian Lenihan visited the prison in December.

Thanks

The committee wish to express appreciation to the governor Mr. Jim Collins and staff at the prison for their cooperation and courtesy to the committee. The committee wish to thank the voluntary organisations that assist the prisoners and the prison service; Cork Simon Community, St. Vincent de Paul, Legion of Mary, Alcoholics Anonymous, and other caring and interested groups.

11/01/08

Terry Kelly Member

Larry Mahony

Nicklas Brown Member.

James Bellin

Aine Butler member.

P. Hurney

Michael Burns - member.

Pet McCarty

James Lynch

John Murphy
Chairperson

Donal O'Shea