

Limerick Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report Encompassing 07-12-2006 to 06-12-2007

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 on occasions. We met with individual prisoners both male and female at various locations throughout the Prison with an average of five presenting themselves to the committee per month. Areas identified as problematic for prisoners are categorised as follows:

1. Transfers to other places of detention,
2. Loss of privileges
3. Temporary Release applications,
4. Restoration of lost remission,
5. Family visits,
6. Medical treatment,
7. General complaints .

Probation Service

The committee notes that the staffing level of the Probation Service within Limerick Prison has increased in line with the committees recommendations of 2006. There are presently 2 full time probation officers with a senior probation officer visiting on a weekly basis. We are happy to note that the probation officers have continued their educational input to offenders by expanding the lifers group and have also provided an alcohol offending programme to female offenders. We also note that with the opening of the new education/medical wing these modular programs will be further expanded.

Female Prison

The committee has attended the female prison on all visits to the prison. We have noted that the maximum bed capacity of 12 has been exceeded excessively on all our visits to the female wing. We have also noted that offenders are continuing to be transferred from the Dochas centre to Limerick Prison without explanation to the offenders. This has caused much stress and anxiety to these prisoners and their families who often reside in the Dublin area. Offenders have also been transferred into Limerick Prison when the wing is already operating at 50 % over capacity. We continue to recommend that the capacity of the female wing be maintained at 12 in order to ensure less pressure on staff and offenders in this confined area. We also recommend that work training, educational services be expanded to the female prison in order to abide by the integrated sentence management ethos of this committee.

Infrastructural areas

The committee welcomes the ongoing upgrading of the educational and medical wing. However we are still awaiting its opening.

As we did in previous years the committee recommends that in - cell sanitation currently in C, D and E wings be extended to the two remaining wings, which are without same at present i.e. A Wing and B Wing. **The committee again recommends this as a matter of priority and urgency.**

Catering

Throughout the year the committee has visited the catering department and has found it to be of the highest standard for cleanliness and hygiene. All food items were sampled at points of production and service to prisoners and were found to be of the highest quality both in presentation and make - up. We are glad to see that our recommendation of 2004-2005 to upgrade the kitchen is complete.

Foreign Nationals

The committee has again noted the marked increase in foreign nationals in custody. **We have to commend all the staff and services within the prison for the empathy they have shown to these non-nationals.** We also note that translators are provided by the governor in order to aid the communication process with these male and female persons.

Education Service

The Education Unit currently offers a number of programmes which underpin Positive Sentence Management as espoused by this committee.

These programmes facilitate inmates to: -

1. Cope with their sentence,
2. Achieve personal development goals,
3. Reintegration into society post release,
4. The establishment of an appetite and an appreciation of the Life Long Learning concept .

Current analysis shows a participation rate between 50% .

The committee also notes that students within the Education Unit continue to offer their work to charitable causes within Limerick City and the surrounding areas. Charitable contributions include: -

- Items of furniture
- Craft and Art work,
- Fabric shop projects.

Benefactors include CARI, Adapt House, Milford Hospice, St Gabriel`s School and Centre, The Alzheimer`s Society, Crumlins Childrens Hospital and Bedford

Row Project.

Substance Abuse

The committee are still extremely concerned as to the availability of drugs within the prison. We think it grossly unfair to prisoners committed who are drug free and because of the availability of drugs within the prison it poses a high risk to these prisoners, and a strong possibility they may leave the prison addicted. We would call on the minister for Justice to explore the possibility of locating full time sniffer dogs at the point of entry to the prison within the prison in order to further enhance the tools available to the governor and his staff in stemming this insatiable appetite for drugs. We feel that the drugs problem within prisons undermines the Irish Prison Services mission to **"provide safe, secure and humane custody for people who are sent to prison"**.

We commend the governor and his staff on the continued work of stemming the drug flow into the prison. We also note the increase in electronic monitoring throughout the prison and would back this initiative as a committee.

We would recommend that further steps to combatting the illegal use of drugs be introduced into Limerick Prison:

1. The use of ultra sound as used in the USA,
2. We would also recommend the speedy introduction of the new search facilities within Limerick Prison.

Psychiatric Service

We have noted the appointment of the Forensic psychiatric team to Limerick

Prison. This service is overseen by the committed surgery staff within the prison and is vitally important due to the increase in prisoners with psychiatric illnesses entering Limerick Prison from the community. We would however hope that imprisonment is not being used as a containment area for such ill persons who could be better treated in the community setting.

We suggest that there be an outreach centre in the community to enable a continuation of treatment for inmates with mental health issues post release.

Forward Planning

We note that the 5 to 7 year capital plan for Limerick Prison is proceeding within the agreed time scales.

Employment

The committee has noted the appointment of an Industrial Manager to Limerick Prison. We note that a number of workshops have opened within the Prison. We as a committee feel that there should be full employment available to all offenders in Limerick Prison. Employment for all offenders would go a long way to the Irish Prison Services commitment " **to managing custodial sentences in a way which encourages and supports prisoners**".

We are happy to support the prisons current ongoing initiative which ensures offenders released from Limerick Prison have accommodation on release. The committee has also noted the large number of offenders who have received direct financial support from the governor throughout the past year.

Psychology Service

We note the continuing comprehensive service provided by the full time psychologist within Limerick Prison.

Visitation

The committee visited Cork Prison during the year which proved extremely informative in terms of regime activities in another institution.

Appointments

We wish to congratulate Governor Tadhg O Riordan on his appointment as Governor to Limerick Prison. We as a committee look forward to working hand in hand with Governor O Riordan over the forthcoming years. In our dealing to date we have found him to be fair, impartial and caring in his dealing with both the committee and offenders.

We would also like to congratulate Judge M Reilly on his appointment to the role of Inspector of Prisons.

Condolences

We the committee wish to pass on our condolences to the following:

It was with regret that we noted the passing of Judge Kinlen Statutory Inspector of Prisons. May he rest in peace.

In conclusion we wish to express our thanks to:

- The Governor,
- The Assistant Governor,
- The secretary and assistant secretary,
- All Prison staff .

We would also like to thank all those who gave advice and assistance to the committee throughout the year, which enabled us to fulfil our duties . This help, co - operation and assistance is very much appreciated by all members of the Visiting Committee of Limerick Prison .