

We wish to submit the annual report of the Training Unit Visiting Committee for 2007.

A total of twelve monthly meetings were held here in that period and it was very gratifying to note that such were very well attended by all members. At the end of 2006, there were only six members appointed to the Committee, but in the following annum, a further three, Mr. Tom Twomey, Mr. Richard Brennan and Mr. Christopher O' Malley were appointed.

Through 2007, the offender population remained high, with a daily average of 90.1. A total of 194 offenders from various Institutions were transferred here. While this number is relatively small compared to other Institutions, it shows that a significant number here are serving long sentences, occupying rooms for years, with the consequence that not many of the remaining offender population obtain a chance to benefit from the training facilities here. It is worth noting that some of such places are occupied by offenders serving life sentences who have failed to keep the conditions of temporary release and are brought back into custody for years as a result. While this Institution has excellent facilities for offender training, such are time-bound and there are many here who have completed all the training that is on offer with still years yet to serve. The Committee would recommend that all long sentence serving offenders coming here would do so with an agreed plan of sentence management with the intention that the coupling of completion of training and a temporary release programme to some outside agency (e.g. PACE., employment etc.) would coincide with release dates, based of course on good behaviour here and the keeping of all the conditions of temporary release.

We would also like to record the considerable decrease in the number of offenders from the Training Unit who were granted temporary release over the Christmas period. This time is a very difficult period for all those in custody and for all their immediate families and release over this time, even for a short duration can be most beneficial in re-establishing relationships.

It is encouraging to know that there are always waiting lists of offenders from most closed Institutions to transfer here. It says much of the value that these people place on the Training Unit's reputation, of its drug-free ethos, its atmosphere and the many agencies available to assist them to become better citizens on release. In this regard, daily temporary release continued to play a vital role in giving offenders the opportunity to improve themselves, educationally, socially and financially by attending PACE Pathways, A.C. R.G, Mountjoy work party, National College of Art and Design, and other places.

The Training Unit is the only drug free Institution within the Prisons Estate, a substantial amount of urine samples were taken from offenders during the year to ensure the validity of the system and to encourage offenders to refrain from drugs or alcohol. A total of 130 offenders were transferred back to the Prisons from which they were originally transferred, 48 being positive for drugs, 32 positive for alcohol, 6 for failing to supply a urine sample. Most of these offenders were accepted back again when clean.

It is with regret that we noted the death in custody of offender Michael Courtney on Friday 23 February 2007. He was found by a member of staff lying in his bed and an inquest into his death has yet to be held.

We mentioned in our last annual report, the Training Unit is to be subsumed into Thornton Hall in the years ahead. The mission statement of the Irish Prison Service is to provide safe, secure and humane custody for people who are sent to prison. The Service is committed to managing custodial sentences in a way which encourages and supports prisoners in their endeavouring to live law abiding and purposeful lives as valued members of society. The members of the Committee feel that the ethos, and

in particular the geographical size, layout and offender population of the Training Unit is ideal to fulfill the aspirations of the mission statement. The vision of Thornton Hall is that it must ;

1. Securely and safely contain those committed to it .
2. Be an environment where rehabilitation is actively promoted. After the presentation to the Visiting Committee Chairpersons in the Irish Prison Service Headquarters on 15 November 2007, we are very concerned that the 'new ' Training Unit will not in any recognisable manner replicate what is here already, that it will be much bigger, less intimate in the sense that all the staff will not know the offenders and that the ethos of an Institution that is well organised, all within working to the best of their capabilities for the betterment of all the offenders here will not be re-created in Thornton Hall.

Training facilities, such as the industrial training workshops, the school and the kitchen continued to provide excellent training opportunities for all the offenders wishing to avail of them. It is hoped that the two addiction counsellors approved in 2007 for the Training Unit will appointed very soon as two offices are already prepared for them.

The visit of Mr Fergus Slattery {former Irish Rugby International} to The Training Unit as a guest speaker for the offenders during the year was a great success and it is hoped to have more guest speakers in the forthcoming year.

No complaints have been made by offenders to the Committee in 2007.

In conclusion, the Committee would like to express their gratitude to the Governor and staff, in particular to the Clerk to the Committee, Mr. Niall Downes and all those who in so many various ways assisted in the management of the entire Institution.

_____ Ms. Geraldine Foster.

_____ Ms. Kathleen Diamond.

_____ Ms. Deirdre Kenneally.

_____ Mr. Richard Brennan.

_____ Mr. Noel Coade.

_____ Mr. Donal Doran.

_____ Mr. Christopher Faulkner.

_____ Mr. Charles O'Malley.

_____ Mr. Tom. Twomey.