

## CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2006

The Visiting Committee to Cloverhill Prison has pleasure in submitting our annual report for 2006 to An Táinste Mr Michael McDowell T.D, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

### **The Committee.**

The Committee met on the second Thursday of each month. The meetings were always well attended. Two members of the committee each month carried out unannounced visits to the prison to ensure that everything was in order and that the prison was being run in a safe, humanitarian and efficient way. During the monthly visits we made a point of conducting detailed and comprehensive tours to the different areas of the prison.

### **Prisoners before the committee.**

Throughout the year we as a committee continued to see large numbers of prisoners, there were 32 prisoners who requested to see the Visiting Committee. As the prison is a remand prison and there is a large turnover of the prison population we make ourselves available so there is little delay in seeing prisoners not only at the monthly meetings, but also during the monthly visits. There were various issues raised by the respective prisoners who came before us, screen visits and transfers have continued to be the main issues.

### **Education**

The Visiting Committee in Cloverhill has continuously called for the opening of an Educational unit which would impact significantly on the daily routine of Prison Officers and Prisoners alike. This project seems to have been beset with ongoing problems and delay. To date all progress has been disappointingly slow.

The Educational unit became operational in September this year. It is at present not open full time, but it is expected to be operating full time in the New Year. Classes have started in Art, English, Music, and English as a Foreign Language, Health Related Fitness, Chess and Basic Literacy. Interviews are still being conducted for places in classes. A Head teacher has yet to be appointed. At present none of the teachers are full time.

These are only formulative steps in the development of an Educational Unit something we as a committee see as a basic necessity. We would hope that the interest at present being shown translates to well attend classes when the unit is fully operational. This will provide a significant outlet for prisoners as part of their daily routine. During monthly visits this has been issue for all prisoners.

Previous committees have placed education as a primary priority; this committee wishes to reiterate that sentiment. It is of paramount importance to the committee that prisoners can maxim their educational opportunities. It is therefore crucial that now it

## CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2006

is open that it should be kept open at all times. We will continue to monitor the progress of the educational unit.

### **Library**

This is an excellent facility available in the prison and when open is utilized by a large proportion of the prison population. Unfortunately, the Library is one of the first areas closed if there are staff shortages.

### **Gymnasium**

The Gymnasium in the prison is well run and is well equipped. It provides quality Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and much needed physical activity. The Gymnasium is available to all prisoners. There are 2 PE Teachers and a number of NECF trained prison officers who work together as a team to provide excellent professional programs and service. They have trained a number of inmates up to FETAC standard in fitness. At the moment the overseeing committee is developing a yearly strategy outlining a program of events for the year.

### **Kitchen**

In the Kitchen the professionally qualified officers and prisoners work together as part of a team to achieve high standards. The Kitchen provides up to 1500 food covers a day more than comparable to any Hotel Kitchen. The quality of food provided and the hygiene standard is excellent. This has been recognised by the fact that the Kitchen has been awarded the National Quality and Excellence Award Q Mark from EIQA for a number of years. The Kitchen caters to and meets the dietary needs of a very diverse prison population. A number of prisoners each year have undergone the 'Leonardo' Training course under the auspices of Fáilte Ireland. The committee would like to commend the staff on the standard maintained in the kitchen.

### **Health Care**

The committee during the year met with a number of the health care professional working in the area. Particular concerns have been expressed regarding the issue of the Counselling and Psychological services. This may be somewhat addressed by the appointment of a new Psychologist in the last few weeks. It is too early to say at the moment. We are pleased at the increase in the number of nursing officers during the year and the appointment of the new full time Doctor. Some concern has been expressed about health care management, including the management of the nursing staff. We welcome the action being taken to appoint a Nurse Manager. The provision of non smoking areas within the prison should be kept under review.

### **Pastoral Care**

There is no chaplain based in Cloverhill since October 2006, and the prison is at presently awaiting a replacement. Pastoral care is at present being provided by Sister Carmel and Sister Margaret who Minister to the needs of the whole Prison, prisoners, prisoners families and Prison Officers. There is an urgent need for the replacement chaplain to arrive.

## CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2006

### **Video Conferencing**

This was due to be piloted in Cloverhill this year. But to date this has not happened yet. The committee welcomes this development which is being set up in the visiting box area.

### **Foreign Nationals**

Cloverhill has more foreign nationals than any other prison in the country. Communication has become an increasing problem and the committee feel that we should be looking at how we can communicate better. The language barrier creates problems that need to be addressed. At the moment other prisoners act as interpreters on a daily basis. The committee have identified this as an area where there is room for development of the role of the Prison Officer. We suggests that one of the ways that this can be addressed is by either specifically recruiting or training up serving prison officers in language skills. Their role would be to act as interpreters and they would be used to deal with prisoners on committal and as required when there is a need for an interpreter. We wish to highlight that there has been over 100 Foreign nationals in Cloverhill Prison on remand/ sentenced at times on a daily basis and over 50 were immigration cases. These individuals largely speak little or no English. The committee feels there are core languages commonly spoken by the Foreign Nationals that can be identified and these languages should be the priority languages in which to get either specific staff recruited and/ or identify if there are serving staff with these language skills or staff that are willing to receive language training.

The Committee further recommends that provisions should be made to translate the committal booklets into the identified core foreign languages and these should be available on request.

### **Overcrowding**

The issue of overcrowding has caused concern continuously during the year. It continues to be an issue with both prisoners and Prison management alike. An example of which is 3 prisoners in a cell designed to accommodate 2.

### **Staff Problems.**

The high level of committals of prisoners arriving out of hours causes a huge problem in the prison with the present staffing levels. The prison should get better information on the number of prisoners coming from the courts and the Garda Stations. It is to the disadvantage of Cloverhill Prison that on frequent occasion's person's for deportations are housed overnight or for a few hours. This puts an additional burden on the Officers, which in turn has a knock on effect on the prisoners. It is most important that ongoing liaisons between all parties concerned should seek to minimise this problem.

### **Drugs**

Drugs are still getting into prison some over the wall, some in clothes and in many other ways. This is making the job of policing this continuously harder. It is proposed that all people entering the prison should have some sort of check for drugs. The possibility of a Sniffer dog should be explored. The screen visits together with the netting on the exercise yard has continued to have a good effect on the amount of

## CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2006

drugs coming into the Prison. However, the smuggling in of drugs continues to remain a problem in prison. The possibility of establishing a Drug Free unit should be explored.

### **Bullying and Racism**

The Inspector of Prisons reported that there is bullying and racism in Cloverhill. The committee does not have any significant evidence of bullying and racism but will continue to monitor this closely. We feel a lot of problems are caused by communication difficulties.

### **Death in Custody**

The committee is saddened by the death in custody of Sean Guerrine. We have asked for further details and to see the Governor's report when available.

### **Conclusion**

The committee has exercised its duties diligently and as always have continued to enjoy an excellent relationship with the Governor and his staff. We would like to thank Governor Somers, Governor Dowling, Deputy Governor Maher, Assistant Governor Bracken, the committee secretary Ms Maria Connolly, the previous secretary Ms Mairead O'Flynn and all the staff for their help and co- operation during the year.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the contribution of all the different agencies who give their time and services on a daily/ weekly basis to the benefit of the service, we commend them.

We the committee finally wish to thank you Minister and trust we have been of service during the year.

Signed on behalf of the committee

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Michael Coyle (Chairman)

Christine Ryan (Vice- Chairperson)

David Delaney

Peggy Downey

Fintan Hudson

Eddie Martin

Gerry O'Dea

Fergus O'Tuama

Tony Williams

Dated \_\_\_\_\_