

*Midlands Prison,
Dublin Road,
Portlaoise,
Co. Laois
Telephone 0502-72110*



*Príosún Lár Na Tíre,
Bóthar Átha Cliath,
Port Laoise,
Co. Laoise.
Telefón 0502-72110*

Minister M. Mc Dowell,
Department of Justice, Equality
& Law Reform,
94 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

15/12/06

Dear Minister,

The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to present its Annual Report for the year 2006.

Medical Services

Two resident doctors remain in place and continue to provide a full service. They are assisted by 14 nurses who provide 24 hour service on a 7 day basis.

- ❖ The Dentist continues to provide a twice weekly service.
- ❖ An Optician is available on request
- ❖ A Chiropodist is also available as required.

The committee welcomes the improvements made in the medical area during 2006; in particular the addition of new offices, pharmacy and consultation rooms in the surgery. The nursing staff at the Midlands have all received training in various aspects of their profession and it is recommended that this training fully exploited in the establishment of various rehabilitation services for drug abusers, alcoholics etc. The assignment of a local nurse manager would also greatly enhance the professional structure and management of the nursing area in relation to consultation and planning for the future.

Psychiatric Services

The number of prisoners who are seriously psychiatrically disturbed is a cause for concern in all prisons. It is inappropriate to have such seriously ill patients incarcerated in prisons which are not equipped to cater to their special needs. The chronic shortage of beds at the Central Mental Hospital has resulted in prisoners who are not fit to be in prison remaining indefinitely without suitable facilities or treatment.

The Midlands lost one part time psychologist in the Summer of 2006, who was not replaced. At the time of writing there was only one full time psychologist to cater to the needs of 450+ prisoners. In view of the large number of lifers and sex offenders at the Midlands, along with the above, the committee considers this to be wholly inadequate and urges the replacement of Mr. Joseph Duffy at the earliest possible opportunity. The committee feels that psychological services should be improved to rehabilitate drug and alcohol dependent offenders as these prisoners may seek compensation in the future if this is not achieved while in prison, prior to release.

A visiting psychiatrist conducts a clinic on a weekly basis. This service is augmented by two community psychiatric nurses who visit twice weekly ensuring that prisoners seeking the services of a psychiatrist can be seen within days.

Prisoners' Requests.

During the course of the year the committee met with a total of 23 prisoners. Generally prisoners were seeking transfers to prisons nearer to their families. No major complaints were received and by and large prisoners were satisfied with the regime and conditions at the Midlands.

Positive Sentence Management

Monthly reviews continued to be held at the prison, with the attendance of an official from the Operations Directorate. These meetings were also attended by the relevant Governor grade, Chief Officer, Assistant Chief Officer, Chaplain and Probation & Welfare officer for each individual wing along with the Head Teacher from the education unit. Applications for transfer or temporary release were considered and dealt with on merit. Each case was carefully considered and sentences were managed positively by way of 1) Programmes of education and/or work training suited to each prisoners ability. 2) Transfers to a less secure regime for prisoners coming towards the end of their sentences. 3) Programmes of regular weekend release for social integration purposes 4) Engagement with probation & welfare services i.e. Linkage to assist with accommodation and employment on release

Probation & Welfare Service

Although the probation & welfare service had a full complement of staff at the beginning of the year, one member of staff was relocated during the Summer months. At the time of writing the staff was made up of 3 full time welfare officers and one senior officer who divides her time between the prison and the outside community. Discussions were ongoing with I.P.S. with a view to removing the Probation and Welfare service from all prisons and basing them in the community. Because of the uncertainty of the situation, and the shortage of staff, all probation & welfare programmes for prisoners were put on hold pending a decision on the matter.

Work/Training/Education Opportunities.

The wide range of activities available to occupy offenders during unlock hours continues to be fully utilised. The committee are particularly impressed by the interest and the success of the horticulture and computer workshops; both of which provide excellent prospects for employment on release. However, the committee note that the demand for places in these areas appears to exceed the capacity of the workshops, resulting in prisoners having to wait a considerable amount of time for places on these courses. The committee recommends that this area be extended to meet the demands of the prison population.

Introduction of Passive Search Dog

A passive search dog was introduced at the Midlands in June of 2006 on a pilot scheme. That scheme has proved very successful and a second dog was added in November. Both dogs work back to back which gives cover on a seven day basis. The committee welcomes the subsequent reduction in the supply of contraband in the prison and are fully supportive of the minister's initiatives in this area.

Developments

- The Midlands was upgraded to the status of committal prison in September of 2006. In order to cater to the need of this new status the prisoners' locker room area in the reception was extended. At the time of writing work had also commenced on an extension to the Main Gate area to facilitate Gardaí arriving from courts and handing over prisoners, along with the relevant paperwork.
- Considerable improvements were made in the surgery area by the addition of a new pharmacy, consultation rooms and offices. We feel that these improvements will greatly enhance services to prisoners in the health care area.
- The old padded/strip cells were refurbished in line with the Minister's directive and the committee welcomes this development.
- With the introduction of the Proposals for Organisational Change in the Prisons Service in January 2006 prisoner escorts were tasked to the

newly formed Prisons Service Escort Corps (PSEC). This involved the use of the newly purchased cellular vans for this purpose. The vans were designed to hold a number of prisoners securely with a significantly reduced number of prison staff, thus greatly reducing the cost of prison escorts nationwide.

- Two cells were converted to cater for disabled prisoners.

Conclusion

It has been a good year for the Midlands prison with significant improvements in health care and drug prevention in particular. Prisoner complaints were minor and there were no major disturbances at the prison in 2006. The committee acknowledges that, with the escalation in violence and gun crime among various gangs in the outside community, it has become increasingly difficult keep various factions segregated from each other and to maintain safe custody. We recognise the Governor's efforts in this area and commend his success.

Finally we would like to thank the Governor, Mr. John O' Sullivan and his secretary, Yvonne Donohoe for their assistance throughout the year. We also acknowledge the co-operation of the staff of the Midlands and the good work carried out at the prison during 2006. We extend the best wishes of the committee to the staff and management for the New Year. The committee would also like to compliment the Minister for his ongoing efforts to reform the prison system.

Colm Wylie (Chairperson)

Briget Teefy (Vice Chairperson)

Theresa Mulhare

Colette Fennelly

John Sheehy

Paddy Boland.

Jody Gunning

Jim Casey

Michael Mc Keever

Jack Bourke

Jennifer Murnane O' Connor

Nuala Halpin.