

Limerick Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report Encompassing 07-12-2005 to 06-12-2006

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 recommends that the staffing levels of the probation service be increased not reduced which is what has happened this year. The committee notes that when the population of Limerick Prison was 150 there were two full time (80 hrs) probation officers assigned to the prison. However now there is close to 300 prisoners, this has been reduced to 1.5 (60 hrs) P&W officers. We feel this is totally unsatisfactory. We are happy to note that even with this very limited personnel constraint, the probation officers have expanded their educational input to offenders by expanding the lifers group and have also provided alcohol offending programme to female offenders.

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 by some 4 to 10 on all our visits to the female wing. We have also noted that offenders are 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 30 % over capacity. We 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 positive sentence management ethos of this committee.

Infrastructural areas

The committee welcomes the ongoing upgrading of the catering department, educational and medical wings.

As we did last year 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 last year to upgrade the kitchen is currently being acted on by the Irish Prison Service.

Foreign Nationals

The committee has noted the marked increase in foreign national in custody, twenty on average throughout 2006 with 13 on average throughout 2005. **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 committee is happy to see the ongoing progress been made in the new Education Unit and Health Care Centre. It is envisaged that this capital project will be completed ahead of schedule. The committee has found that the education staff within Limerick Prison continue to provide a high quality programme of education for prisoners, this, despite the current limitations encountered due to infrastructural constraints. 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 .

Students where appropriate, are encouraged and facilitated to work with the transdisciplinary team within the prison environment. It is noted by the committee that every effort is made to broaden access and participation in education within the prison. The committee congratulates all students who completed exams in the education unit over the last twelve months. Current analysis shows a participation rate between 60- 65%.

Pre-release programmes continue to be based on a multi - disciplinary ethos . 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 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,

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.**

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, but regrets that the industrial staff to open work shops have not been appointed to 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**".

Connect

The committee notes that the connect project which is the key stone to any positive sentence management initiative is currently shelved in Limerick Prison due to staffing constraints. 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 welcome the appointment of a psychologist to Limerick Prison and note that this service has both male and female members which is ideal for the two prisons located in the Limerick Prison complex.

Visitation

There were no visits to other sites this year.

Condolences

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

The V/Chairperson, Tom Harrington on the death of his mother and Noreen Mitchel on the death of her niece.

We also wish to pass on our condolences to the Wife and family of Governor Pat Laffan on his untimely death. We as a committee have worked hand in hand with Governor Laffan over the years and have always found him to be fair, impartial and caring oin his dealing with both the committee and offenders.

In conclusion we wish to express our thanks to:

- The Governor,
- The Deputy 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.