

## **St. Patrick's Institution**

### **Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report for year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006**

We, the members of the Visiting Committee for St. Patrick's Institution are pleased to submit our annual report for 2006 to Mr. Michael McDowell, T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The committee met monthly in St. Patrick's Institution and the committee members also carried out in excess of 20 unannounced visits to the prison to ensure that everything in the prison was run in an efficient, fair, safe and humanitarian way and we are pleased to confirm that this has always been the case.

We again wish to place on record that in this institution the welfare of the inmates is of primary concern and wish to record our thanks and appreciation to the Governor and his staff for the excellent management and running of the institution.

During 2006, a number of positive developments were implemented and these we believe will have a better, more constructive impact on the welfare of inmates while in prison.

#### **Accommodation**

During all of our visits to the prison no instances of overcrowding in the prison were noted or brought to the attention of the committee.

#### **Kitchen**

The kitchen in St. Patrick's is operated to the highest standards in hygiene and service. Food continues to be prepared in a very efficient manner by a very professional qualified staff and members of the prison population who are also employed in the kitchen.

#### **Education**

The visiting committee place education and skills training as a priority.

The school continues to provide an excellent facility with excellent teachers, however the building in which it is housed needs to be considered for upgrading. The normal academic year is not suitable for prison students. School education should be available throughout the whole year. If this is not available through the VEC, then an alternative option should

be provided by the IPS. This requirement should be addressed as a requirement in the planning for Thornton Hall.

Given the education needs of the prisoners, and the fact that in some cases inmates are in prison for a short period of detention, the committee believe that teaching staff numbers should be increased to enable the delivery of a one-to-one ethos of education. This ensures that the schooling, while in prison, can be of maximum impact and benefit to the prisoners.

### **Workshops**

The committee wish to acknowledge the setting up of the workshop facilities in St. Patrick's during 2006. These were introduced on a phased basis with the metal-work workshop being the last remaining workshop, which opened in December. Whilst the pace of opening the workshops can be frustrating, their arrival will provide new opportunities for personal development for inmates as we believe they are an integral part of rehabilitation training.

Without these facilities life can be very boring for inmates. An integral part of the personal development of inmates has to be providing them with the opportunities to develop new skills. We also support the decision of the Governor to close recreation yards during workshop times in order to encourage inmates to use them.

We are pleased to see the implementation and extensive utilisation of the new workshops within St. Patrick's Institution. We are pleased with the general take-up rate of inmates for the new the workshop classes which is encouraging and a strong step in the right direction.

### **CCTV**

During the year, CCTV was installed in the yards along with upgraded lighting. We welcome this development and it should help in the fight against drugs coming into the yard.

### **Drugs**

The scourge of drugs being thrown over the perimeter walls of the prison continued throughout the year. The introduction of CCTV and operations by the local Gardai Siochana, although a deterrent, did not eliminate the problem. We support the plan by the Governor to introduce methods to improve protection and to eliminate drugs coming over the perimeter wall. There is a need for greater Gardai resources to be made available to respond to contraband being thrown over the perimeter wall and to support

eliminating this problem. The Governor and his staff are committed to the elimination of this problem and we fully support their initiatives.

### **Children in custody**

There is no separate detention facility for children between the ages of 16 years and 17 years in St. Patrick's Institution. Even when children are committed to St. Patrick's the option to be treated in a child-centred ethos does not exist. In the context of the Children's Act 2001, this is an issue which we have raised with the Governor. The committee want a comprehensive briefing on the Act and agreement on our obligations in relation to this act. We believe that there should be an immediate implementation of this act with full separation of children from adults.

### **Best Practice in Support of Childcare**

In preparation for this development, the committee will also require further information on best practices in the support of children in detention, so that we can best fulfil our mandate for all inmates.

### **Inmates meeting with the Committee**

We are pleased to confirm that, unlike the situation as highlighted in our last annual report for 2005, a number of inmates requested to see the Committee at most of the monthly meetings during the year. Visiting Committee members also make contact with inmates during visits and issues and requests which were identified were brought to the attention of the Governor and attended to. The committee welcome these interactions and we are satisfied that representations which we have made on behalf of inmates are being considered and where possible and practical are being addressed by prison management.

### **Sunday Visits**

We understand that under the 1947 rules and regulations relating to prisons, it is prohibited to have prison visits on a Sunday. In today's world we find this ruling very restrictive, It is often very difficult for visits to be made during the week and Sunday is often an important family day. We would encourage the IPS to seek the changing of this regulation and to introduce Sunday visits.

### **Special Observation Units**

The Committee have requested, on a number of occasions, details on the procedures in relation to the use and detention of inmates in the Special Observation Units and to date we have not received such details. This is an issue of serious concern to us. We would ask that clear guidelines for the use of such units be set out and agreed and that a log / record in relation to the use of such units be maintained.

### **St. Patrick's Institution and the Press.**

The committee noted the adverse media coverage which the prison received on a number of occasions during 2006. Comments appeared to be exaggerated and uninformed and do not reflect the general positive steps which are being taken by the Prison Service.

### **Cleanliness throughout the prison**

Over the past year the visiting Committee have highlighted the issue of lack of cleanliness, especially in the perimeter of yards and in the toilet facilities. Whilst actions have been taken where issues were highlighted, we would encourage that this issue be addressed on a more proactive and routine basis.

### **Exercise Yard**

The exercise yard, where prisoners spend a large proportion of their time, is a very oppressive environment. It is fully concreted, with high fencing surrounds it and the netting on top to prevent contraband being thrown into the yard. There is also wire on the edge of building roofs. Whilst all of these deterrents are necessary and arise from the benefit of experience in needing them, one cannot get away from the fact that the yard is not a pleasant environment. During the coming year we would request that steps be taken to reduce the oppressive nature of the exercise yard to include putting up murals on the walls and use of colour to brighten the area.

### **Death and Injury**

During the year, there was one death in custody. The Visiting Committee wish to extend our sincere sympathy to the family of this inmate. There were numerous attempted suicides and also a number of incidents of climbing onto the net which covers the yard. It was only due to the vigilance of staff that these situations did not end up in more deaths. Climbing up onto the nets is generally motivated by the availability of quantities of drugs which have been thrown onto the netting. This adds to the dangers while the inmates are on the netting and there have been instances where prisoners have fallen from significant heights.

### **Inspected the Complaints Register**

During the year, the committee reviewed the prison complaints management procedure. We requested sight of the complaints log which the Governor arranged and we inspected the complaints log and noted the process which was carried out to record and follow-up on prisoner complaints.

### **Presentations to the Visiting Committee**

During the year a number of staff made presentations to the committee to assist new members fully understand the services provided within the prison. These were informative and comprehensive and helped the new committee. We wish to sincerely thank the staff concerned and acknowledge the effort and time they put into preparing for and attending the meeting.

At the request of the committee, the Director of Operations of the IPS, Mr Connolly attended a committee meeting to discuss the role of the committee, the Thornton Hall development plans and other general points relating to St. Patrick's. We wish to thank Mr. Connolly for taking the time to attend our meeting – it was very helpful.

### **Thornton Hall**

The committee recognise that there is significant planning and design work underway for the new Thornton Hall facility. We believe that it is important for the various Visiting Committees to be kept informed on developments and provided with the opportunity to input into the designs of the facility.

### **Challenges for new committee members**

The committee wish to draw attention to the absolute lack of training, information and support which is available to committee members when they take up their place on a visiting committee. There is an immediate need for the IPS to address this issue, not only for the committee for St Patrick's, but for all other Visiting Committees.

### **CPT Visit**

In October, a delegation of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) recently carried out a twelve-day visit to Ireland. During this visit the delegation visited a number of institutions including St Patrick's. We look forward to their report which we understand will be issued in March 2007.

### **Visit to Trinity House**

The committee were afforded the opportunity to visit Trinity House during the year. This was a very welcome interaction and was a very informative visit. We would like to thank the staff who facilitated the visit and shared their experience with us.

### **Meeting of Chairpersons of Prison Visiting Committees**

On behalf of the visiting committee in St Patrick's, the chairman attended a meeting of the chairpersons of all visiting committees throughout the country in November. This was the first such meeting in eighteen months. We believe that there is value in such meetings and would encourage them to continue to be held on a half-yearly basis.

### **Conclusion**

We are pleased to submit this report and feel that St. Patrick's continues to be very well run by a professional Governor and Staff.

We wish to express our thanks for their co-operation and assistance to Governor Lennon, Deputy Governor Murphy, Assistant Governor Hughes and the committee secretary Mr. Paul Flynn.

The Visiting Committee members are committed to fulfilling our function in full. We believe there is room for continuous improvement in the prison and we are looking forward to continued working in close cooperation with the Prison staff, the prisoners, the Irish Prison Services and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Michael Mc Dowell, T.D.

John Bielenberg \_\_\_\_\_

Michael Billane \_\_\_\_\_

Victor Boyhan \_\_\_\_\_

Anthony Gavin \_\_\_\_\_(Chairperson 2006)

Gerry Gaughan \_\_\_\_\_

Denis Murphy \_\_\_\_\_

Dick O'Leary \_\_\_\_\_

Catherine Quinn \_\_\_\_\_