

**Midlands Prison,
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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,
72-76 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

31/3/04

Re: Annual Report 2003 - Midlands Prison.

Dear Minister,

At a meeting convened to complete our annual report it quickly became obvious that such a report would be merely a replication of the detailed issues dealt with in our annual report of last year.

We have decided that, rather than the mere replication of last year's report, we would opt to highlight specific important and urgent matters.

While we acknowledge the work of the Governor and his staff in their endeavours to improve the various services, we feel the main resolution of these urgent issues are in fact outside their control.

The committee adopted the same format as our last report in highlighting the urgent matters and are categorised as follows:

Structure and Layout of Prison

- ★ Cut off access to perimeter wall
- ★ Demolish the old houses and close off the street. Acquire the adjoining land thus preventing access through the fields.
- ★ Until action is taken on a permanent arrangement to restrict access to the perimeter wall, a Garda presence should be arranged at least for the hours before and during exercise periods.

Education and Training

- ★ Introduce reward/incentive for prisoners partaking in education or training programmes. Suggestions would include a link to temporary release programme, parole, court reports etc.
- ★ Review prison policy in relation to paying prisoners for working in the kitchen, landings, laundry etc., in line with other prisons. It was felt that this position should be clarified with the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform and that a uniform system should be operated in all prisons or specifically link educational achievement at basic literacy and numeracy levels with an incentive. The Visiting Committee is concerned at the high degree of such prisoners with poor skills in this area and encourages the introduction of a scheme which would encourage greater participation.
- ★ Prison education and training records should be attached routinely to prisoners' official files.
- ★ The committee was concerned at the possible closure or reduction in any educational and training programmes.
- ★ Any reduction in these programmes would have serious effects on the efficient, safe and secure running of the prison.

Probation & Welfare

The Visiting Committee also strongly urges the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to provide resources for a package of medium and long term sentence planning. That is, the Probation & Welfare service should compile and implement a programme of rehabilitation, training and personal development around the full life span of any particular sentence, taking account of the individual's personality, needs, addiction and likelihood of re-offending.

The Visiting Committee would also welcome ongoing involvement and linkage by the Probation & Welfare services with Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous and expansion of a counselling service within the prison. The Visiting Committee further urges the Department to establish earlier and more structured links between community based services and halfway houses such as PACE, Bond project, Abusive Substance Projects and the national and local Probation & Welfare Service. It is a matter of concern for the Visiting Committee that many prisoners, upon their release, have little or no support because of the shortage of resources right across the Probation & Welfare services.

Medical

It is felt that insufficient resources are deployed to the rehabilitation of prisoners in the areas of welfare, psychological and psychiatric services. The Visiting Committee recommends to the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform that additional resources are made available for an improved service and that progress is monitored in conjunction with a managed sentence programme. From consultation with professionals within and outside of the prison it is felt that this would likely lead to a reduced incidence of re-offending and a greater possibility of reintegration in society.

Increased resources in the psychiatric services are a key priority as the service available at the present time is virtually non-existent. The waiting times for assessments are excessive and are causing undue strains on management, personnel and resources. It is felt that more specific facilities must be provided for prisoners with psychiatric needs, as they do not appear to be progressing under the current regime. *The recent influx of prisoners transferred from the Curragh and other prisons has put an extra strain on the medical services at the Midlands and it is felt that, bearing in mind the particular category of these offenders, the need for permanent full time Psychological and Psychiatric services has never been more pressing.*

A drugs addiction treatment programme must be put in place as a matter of priority. It is estimated that 80% of the crimes committed by prisoners in the Midlands Prison are drug related so it is imperative that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform acts to address this anomaly. It is felt that it is impossible to make any progress on the rehabilitation and recovery of prisoners if the necessary medical and other supports are not in place.

Greater effort is required in the preparation of prisoners for release, especially those on longer sentences. This matter should be addressed at both national and local level, and the National Policy must direct services outside of prisons to liaise with prison services in preparing prisoners for release and in arranging services and supports for them, like accommodation, training, work etc. Greater efforts must be made by the prison to forge stronger links with the support groups and agencies presently in place, to maximise the benefits for prisoners on release.

Recommendations

The Visiting Committee recommends that the following steps should be taken to improve the quality of life of convicted persons and prepare them to return to active participation in society.

- ✓ Increase the number of medical staff employed.
- ✓ Introduce "Drug Free" landings, where prisoners who are drug free or striving to remain apart from the drugs arena can be accommodated.
- ✓ A proper assessment of each individual's problems and background, which led to conviction.
- ✓ A documented action care plan outlining the goals which should be addressed in a holistic manner during detention.
- ✓ A multidisciplinary team to help ascertain the above points and go forward with a rehabilitation programme.
- ✓ To facilitate rehabilitation there needs to be a proper psychiatric treatment area in the overall plan. This will require a medical physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurses, nurse officers, counsellors and social workers and pastoral care - this should be ratio based to give a proper service to all prisoners who require this facility.
- ✓ Special clinics for drug and alcohol rehabilitation. This should include workshops, education and library facilities and work closely with NA and A.A.
- ✓ Continuous appraisal and case conferencing to monitor and adjust progress where necessary i.e. reduction of medication.
- ✓ A dietician and catering support for staff to help with a programme for prisoners who have special needs e.g. Diabetes and heart complaints.
- ✓ Health promotion to help prisoners to take responsibility for their own health and well being and so aid a holistic approach to eventual discharge.
- ✓ A step down facility to help when the prisoner is eventually discharged, introducing the voluntary and community facilities that are available to help with rehabilitation and reintegration.
- ✓ To undertake the above, the number of medical, psychiatric, psychological and counselling staff, along with welfare officers needs to be increased if the rehabilitation programme is to be successful in helping the individual. It is felt that an effective working plan must be put in place immediately for the welfare and rehabilitation of our prisoners, especially those with addictions as the State may someday be accountable for their treatment while in the care of the State.

Conclusion

- ★ The Education and Training services within the prison offers a comprehensive range of facilities and the Visiting Committee recognises the excellent work being undertaken, however the Committee are very concerned about any reduction in the level of these services due to restrictions on funding.
- ★ While the Committee recognise the added pressure on resources due to the particular category intake of prisoners from the Curragh, any shortfall in funding should be made up by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform instead of penalising the day to day budget. These particular prisoners place an additional burden on medical and psychiatric/psychological services and this needs to be addressed urgently.
- ★ Numerous shortcomings have been identified in the Probation and Welfare service. It is felt that this area is greatly understaffed and that insufficient attention is paid to the overall approach to sentence management. It is felt that this problem needs to be addressed at national level.

Charles O' Connor
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Acknowledgement

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