

Introduction:

The Committee meet each month on the first Thursday of the month. The meetings were well attended. Visits were undertaken by two members of the Committee who are nominated at our monthly meeting. The Committee conduct detailed and comprehensive tours of the prison, visiting workshops, school, in-reach, etc. They meet and engage with both prisoners and staff. They conduct regular visits to the committal area where all committals are housed until assessed by the Governor on his daily parade. All of this took place until Covid-19 restrictions came into force and this restricted what the committee could do.

Staffing Levels:

Staffing levels within the Prison improved throughout the year but there remains a shortage of a number of critical work and training roles within the prison for the provision of services.

Retirement of Staff:

There were seven staff retirements throughout 2020 in Castlerea. We wish the best of luck to all staff on their retirement and in particular to Mr. Martin Reilly who retired as Governor of Castlerea after 40 years of service and also to the Prison Chaplin Margaret Connaughton, both of whom we worked with closely for a number of years.

New Members to the Visiting Committee:

Breege Grealis joined our committee, also John Keavney was reassigned to the committee

Retirement of Members of Visiting Committee:

We have a full committee. There was no retirements in 2020.

Attempted Suicides:

The number of attempted non serious self-harm incidents continues to reduce. This is mainly due to the facilities on C1 landing, staff vigilance, timely medical interventions and the continued support of Psychiatry and Psychology services within the Prison throughout a particularly challenging year in the context of the pandemic.

Prisoners before the Committee

Prisoners who wished to speak to the Committee were brought before the committee until COVID-19 restrictions were enforced. Prisoners then talked to the committee via a video call.

Surgery:

There is no General Practice Doctor assigned to Castlerea. Cover is provided by a locum service. This lack of clinical governance and oversight of prisoner care with this level of service provision presents potential problems. That being said we are informed that the Prison Service is presently recruiting a Doctor to be assigned to Castlerea and we welcome this news.

Chaplaincy:

There is great work carried out by the Chaplaincy Service. They provide a dedicated and professional service attending to the various personal needs of Prisoners in Castlerea. The committee welcome Sinead McNeela to the full time Chaplaincy position in Castlerea, our best wishes go to Sinead and her colleague Seamus Talbot in the administration of their roles.

School Area:

The work done in the school area once again is acknowledged. There is a very high level of interest in the classes provided, with some classes been oversubscribed. Initiatives like – Red Cross, Conflict Resolution, Mediation, Drama – all are proving a huge success in maintaining peace and harmony among prisoners. Again all of this work is restricted due to Covid-19, however the Committee acknowledge the continued support provided to the Prison throughout the pandemic by the team in the Education department.

Parole Board:

The resources of the Probation service within the Prison remain challenging however the committee were pleased to learn that a new Probation Officer was appointed within the second half of the year which will assist greatly in the provision of services and guidance towards parole for a number of suitable offenders.

Booking Of Prison Visits:

The booking of visits remains an issue in Castlerea with the staffing of this area frequently diminished due to lack of resources.

Kitchen:

The Kitchen within the Prison continues to be a sought after position in terms of structured employment and activity amongst the prisoner with approximately 35 prisoners employed in the provision of services throughout the Prison. This area remains as a critical work and training activity for inmates who enjoy the structure and responsibilities associated with the catering environment.

Tuck Shop:

The Prison Tuck Shop is a resounding success. It supplies a large array of items for Prisoners to purchase. It also supplies newspapers to allow prisoners to stay in touch with current affairs. The staff can also arrange for special purchases with the permission of the Governor. It is noted by the Committee that the staff working in this area are extremely busy with nearly 300 prisoners looking for the tuck shop on a weekly basis, the tuck shop adapted throughout the year due to the pandemic by introducing a bag and tag process which sees all orders fulfilled and delivered to individual cells without the need to present at the shop directly.

Waste Management:

In line with our commitment to environmental issues we provide the best possible training in waste management. Twenty offenders currently work in this area. It is now combined with horticulture and prisoners engaging in a number of Horticulture programmes.

Comparative Visit:

There was no visit to any prison in 2020.

Facilities

There is a high standard of education, work and training provided for all prisoners. Timetables in the school allows all prisoners access to the facility, and classes are run on the reserve period to accommodate this. All workshops, education and gymnasium are designated safe free zones under the Red Cross.

Castlerea Prison introduced a Prisoner communication channel in 2020 which resulted in specific information being relayed directly to Prison cells, this project is most welcome and we acknowledge the importance of such a feature during the year in the back drop of reduced services as a result of Covid – 19. The ability to play educational material, fitness videos and relay important Covid information to prisoners is recognized as a most valuable contribution to the management of the Prison. Additionally the provision of a system of video visits for prisoners to maintain contact with family members and loved ones was a most welcome introduction to the Prison and the committee take note of the success of this initiative and its advantages to the prisoner population.

Visiting Committee Administration

A PCO looks after the administration for the Visiting Committee in a very efficient manner and is always very courteous and helpful.

Harristown House

Harristown House continued to operate effectively throughout 2020 with an average of 4 prisoners living in the house on a full time basis, the committee were saddened to learn of the passing of one of the residents early in 2020 and wish to express their condolences to the family of that individual.

Conclusion:

The committee inspected the Prison on numerous occasions up until the onset of the Covid – 19 restrictions. The great work of the Staff and Prisoners in meeting the challenges posed by Covid-19 is to be commended, 2020 was a most difficult year and we would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the great effort employed by the Prison community in keeping each other safe and well through the year. Once again this year the members of the Committee feel that Castlerea is a very well run prison with very professional and courteous staff. The Committee would like to acknowledge the courtesy and help extended to them by the Governor and Staff over the last year.

**Visiting Committee Members
Annual Report Castlerea 2020**

MR J. O'MALLEY

MR M. LEONARD

MR T. GARVEY

MR J. KEAVNEY

MR P. GREANEY

MRS B. GREALIS