

VISITING COMMITTEE MIDLANDS PRISON

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Midlands Prison is a closed, medium security prison for adult males. It is the committal prison for counties Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Monaghan. The prison population in the Midlands prison is in excess of 800. The committee notes that c.40% of the prison population of the Midlands in December 2016 were convicted of sex offences. This, we understand, represents approximately 70% of all prisoners in the State convicted of such offences.

The purpose of The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee is to ensure that all prisoners in the care of the Irish Prison Service at the Midlands Prison are treated fairly and humanely and also with dignity and respect.

The Visiting Committee of the Midlands Prison in 2016 consisted of the following members: Ted Laffey (until October 2016), Margaret O'Dwyer (until October 2016), Joe Leahy, John Kelly, Derek Mulcahy (appointed January 2016) and Anna Tuohy-Halligan (appointed December 2016) .

The committee meets in the prison to conduct meetings and meet with any prisoners requesting to see us. The committee may also conduct an unannounced visit and will, if requested by prison management, visit the prison on other occasions.

On our many visits during 2016, we met prisoners at their request, and listened to their concerns, complaints and requests privately and in confidence. We raised all issues with the authorities at governor level, and sought to bring all issues to a satisfactory conclusion.

We wish to confirm that based on what we have seen on our visits, all staff and services working within the prison and those external services working with prisoners do so in a professional manner with the interest of the prisoners' welfare as a priority.

2. PRISONERS' REQUESTS

In 2016, the committee met with 35 prisoners during the course of the year to hear their concerns. The main issues raised by the prisoners were as follows:

- Health/Medical Issues
- Access to Enhanced Regime and School
- Inter-Prison Transfers
- Missing Clothing and Other Property
- Prison Visits/Treatment of Visitors
- Lack of Information in Response to Complaints
- Support Upon Release
- Assaults

2.1 Health/Medical Care Issues

During the course of their visits, the committee was alerted to the apparent discrimination in the provision of dental services to prison inmates. Those prisoners who are serving a life sentence have access to dental hygienist services; all other prisoners are not automatically provided with this access.

The issue was raised with Governor Mullen, and the committee recommended that the discrepancy is investigated with the same services made available to all members of the prison population equally.

2.2 Access to Enhancement Regime and School

A number of prisoners believed that they had unfairly lost their enhancement status. Having discussed this issue with the Governor, the committee was satisfied that fair procedures are followed. There are only a limited number of jobs available at any time within the Prison. It was suggested that Prisoners should engage with the school in order to improve their enhancement entitlements. However, it was acknowledged that there can sometimes be difficulties in accessing the school due to a lack of available resources. In particular, staff shortages can compromise the provision of access to segregated prisoners.

2.3 Inter-Prison Transfer Requests

During the year a number of prisoners requested transfer to another prison for various reasons. Having discussed such requests with the Governor, the committee accepts that such transfer applications are an operational matter with the decision being the task of the IPS.

2.4 Missing Clothing and Other Property

We heard some complaints from prisoners who were concerned about items of clothing and other personal articles being misplaced or lost – these situations often involving inter-prison transfers. Following discussion and investigation by the prison authorities, the missing items have now been either located or replaced.

2.5 Prison Visits/Treatment of Visitors

Some prisoners raised the issue of prison visits where visitors were denied access, or were told that the prisoner did not want to see the visitor. These issues were raised with the prison authorities and have now been resolved.

2.6 Lack of Information in Response to Complaints

Concern was raised by some prisoners that there was a lack of information in responses to complaints made to the authorities. While understanding the prisoner concerns, the committee was assured by the prison authorities that proper procedures were being followed in the prison regarding the processing of complaints.

2.7 Support Upon Release

Some prisoners who were approaching their release date were concerned at the perceived lack of practical support available – e.g. in arranging passport photos to get id for social supports/ proof of identity on release. The committee raised the issue with the Governor's office and the matter has now been resolved. The committee noted that the prison Resettlement Support Worker offers support and guidance in planning for release and information on accessing relevant services on release.

2.8 Assault

Some prisoners reported that they were the victims of assault. While the committee recognises the sterling work done by the prison staff, we also recognise that in the prison environment, it is impossible to completely eliminate the risk of assault. The committee was advised by the prison authorities that in an assault situation, prisoners should report the matter to the Gardaí. All prisoners have been made aware of this.

3. SENTENCE MANAGEMENT

Midlands Prison operates an Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) system which guides the management of prisoner sentences and their time spent in prison. The aim of ISM is that from the time prisoners are committed to prison to the time they return to the community, each prisoner will have a plan developed by all the prison services and agencies along with the prisoner himself, to help him make the best use of his time in prison and to assist in his re- integration into the community.

4. PROBATION SERVICE

4.1 Living with Life Programme

The Living with Life Programme was developed in 2012 in the Midlands Prison as a joint initiative by the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service (IPS). Those prisoners serving life sentences, are encouraged to take the lead in overseeing the programme.

During 2016 the Living with Life Programme offered various forums, meetings and seminars to prisoners serving long term/life sentences:

5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS

5.1 Building Better Lives (BBL) Programme

The Building Better Lives (BBL) has been operating in Arbour Hill prison since 2009. During 2015 the Midlands Prison authorities worked on introducing the BBL Programme to the Midlands, and the first stage of the program – “Exploring Better Lives” (EBL) commenced in the Midlands Prison in September 2016.

The BBL program uses a risk assessment approach to identify an individuals’ risks, needs and protective factors. The assessment informs treatment over three stages-

- Stage 1: ‘Exploring Better Lives (EBL)’ enhances motivation and further identifies treatment targets (facilitated jointly by the IPS Psychology Service and the Probation Service)
- Stage 2: ‘Practicing Better Lives (PBL)’ includes 60-70 sessions of in-depth therapeutic and risk relevant work in Arbour Hill (facilitated by the IPS Psychology Service)
- Stage 3: ‘Building Better Lives Support Programme (BBL Support Group)’ supports maintenance of progress, and addresses key risk and resettlement issues. This stage takes place in either Arbour Hill or the Midlands prisons. It is currently facilitated by the Probation Service in Arbour Hill.

It is anticipated that treatment / intervention will thus be provided to a greater number of higher risk offenders. This collaborative initiative between the IPS and the Probation Service aims to develop a process which will maintain and increase the participation of those at higher risk of sexual violence in treatment and allied initiatives while in custody.

5.2 Work & Training Area

Furniture restoration was introduced as a new activity into The Midlands Work and Training Area in 2016, with the support and co-operation of Kevin Mullall, a furniture restoration expert. Kevin had links with the Office of Public Works, who sourced antique pieces requiring restoration.

The weekly workshops were conducted over 14 weeks in the latter half of the year and attended by prisoners from the Carpentry and Building Skills Workshops. 10 pieces of furniture were restored and it is anticipated that furniture restoration will be introduced as a stand-alone activity for prisoners in a separate location from the Carpentry Shop

The Work & Training area above the new Kitchen was very much in demand throughout the whole of 2016. The print facility continues to successfully operate on a daily basis.

The picture framing shop remains hugely popular and has contributed to several high end requests for quality presentation pieces. This top end product outlet is supported

by the quality printing and engraving workshops which are located alongside. However, there appears to be some difficulties experienced in keeping the picture framing and engraving workshops open on a daily basis.

Grass stool products and match stick model making have been delivered in the engraving shop as promised last year and, we are told, are proving very popular at a small cost.

The multimedia computer facility which was in the planning stages last year, is now live and current with six new PCs ordered. This area will give employment to 10 prisoners in 2017. Currently there are 6 employed here (when it is not cut under the DTLs).

5.3 Further Development of Work Area at E and G

This area has been grown and significantly developed during 2016. Two storage containers have been sourced and refurbished to provide a very valuable workshop space on the site. 37 hanging baskets and twelve large planter boxes (made on site) were delivered to Portlaoise Tidy Towns in 2016.

Another development in this area has been the memorial garden which remembers those who have passed away over the past number of years. Features such as living armchairs have been incorporated into this space and reflect the care and attention given to the area by the prisoners.

5.4 Charity Fundraising

The committee was informed that there were not many requests for Charity Fund-raisers throughout 2016. The prison did however link up again with Temple Street Children's Hospital and refurbished some of the props that were made in 2015 as part of the caravan project. A Special toadstool picnic table was also commissioned by them for use at their fund-raisers at the Electric Picnic and the National Ploughing Championships.

The Metal Shop was involved in the production of two specially commissioned Buddy Benches which were designed, manufactured and delivered to schools in Castletown and Nenagh. The whole concept of the Buddy Bench is to provide a seat where children can take some time to sit and share any little worries or concerns that they may wish to confide in a buddy.

The Carpentry Shop made 12 very well designed collection boxes for the Cuisle Cancer Care Centre. These boxes which are mounted on pedestals were made from pine and were tastefully emblazoned with the title of the centre by means of pyrography. The Centre was delighted with the boxes which can be transported to different locations and are easily identifiable and recognizable.

5.5 Lifers' Garden

Work continued within the Lifers garden throughout 2016 with the laying of paths, patio slabs and kerbing. The pergola area was roofed and brickwork added. A new lawn and further planting was also completed.

5.6 Time Server Magazine

This publication has continued to grow in popularity and a dedicated cohort of prisoners form part of the whole production team in conjunction with Mr Cleary and Mr Scally. The team also compiled a very informative and imaginative publication called "Play it like a Pro Simplified" and this is a collection of 111 songs with all the lyrics and chords clearly laid out towards learning to play the guitar. It was used to good effect before Christmas at the annual sing-song at the prisoners breakfast.

6. MEDICAL SERVICES

Some concerns were expressed in our 2015 report regarding the administrative/nursing resource available to the prison doctor. In 2015, the Midlands Prison Medical Services comprises just one full time doctor. While a second doctor was available for some time that doctor left the service during the year.

The committee has been advised that in 2016, there has been an overall increase in staffing with the prison having a current allocation of 2.5 GPs, 22 nursing staff (an increase of 5 since 2015) and 1 chief nurse officer. The medical administration post is filled by a full-time PASO.

In addition, we have been informed by the Chief Nurse Officer that there is full-time Psychiatric cover, an allocation of 1.8 WTE Drug Counsellors and that monthly chiropody and optical services are provided. Dental cover is provided on a sessional basis three times per week.

The committee is pleased to note that their previous concerns re staffing in this area have been addressed, and commend the Prison Medical Services team.

7. EDUCATION

7.1 Curriculum

A comprehensive educational curriculum is offered to prisoners by The Midlands Prison Education Unit. This curriculum includes the following subjects:

- English
- Mathematics
- The Humanities
- Computer Studies
- Multimedia
- Material Technology
- Home Economics
- Physical Education
- ESOL
- Languages
- Arts & Crafts (incl Ceramics)
- Music
- Drama
- Educational Guidance
- Accounting & Computerised Accounts
- Horticulture

In 2016, the Education Unit added Upholstery classes to this list.

7.2 Participation

In 2016, there were over 400 students registered with the Midlands Education Service with participation ranging from one class per week up to full time participation. Education is offered in the main school area, on E and G Division, the Horticulture Workshop and on C1 landing.

7.3 Accreditation

There were 224 FETAC folders submitted for external assessment in 2016 as follows:

- Level 1: 2
- Level 2: 9
- Level 3: 155
- Level 4: 32
- Level 5: 26

In addition, 6 prisoners sat the Leaving Certificate in 2016.

7.4 Red Cross and First Aid Programme

18 Red Cross Certificates were awarded in 2016 with 7 prisoners completing the mentoring programme as part of the Red Cross Community Based Health & First Aid Programme.

7.5 GAISCE Award

GAISCE - the President's Award, is Ireland's National Challenge Award for young people. It is the country's most prestigious and respected award from the President of Ireland to those outside the Defence Forces or An Garda Síochána. The Visiting Committee congratulates the 9 recipients of the Bronze Gaisce Award and the 3 individuals who received the Silver Award in 2016. We also wish to thank and highly commend the principal and staff of the school along with the prison officers who organized the excellent and very enjoyable award ceremony.

7.6 Other Areas

Other educational programmes undertaken in the Midlands Prison during 2016 included:

- Wrap Programme (13)
- Safe Talk (80)
- Minding Your Mental Health (15)
- Anger Management (40)
- Pre-Release (65)

8. LIBRARY

The Library in the prison is well presented and provides a wide range of reading material.

Prisoners from Divisions A, B, and D have access to the library in the evenings from Tuesday through to Friday, with Divisions E, G and C rostered for Sunday afternoons and evenings.

9. PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

2016 saw the ongoing development and expansion of services provided by the Psychology team as described in their new stepped care model of primary, secondary and tertiary care. Having previously delivered one-to-one in the areas of secondary and tertiary care only, the team in 2016 has now expanded the service offered to include primary care mental health groups.

10. MIDLANDS VISITOR CENTRE

The Midlands Prison Visitor Centre provides a range of information and reception services for prisoners' families and friends. In 2016, there was an increase of over 3,000 visits to the prison by family and friends, bring the year's total to 27,279 – made up of 45,430 adults and 11,459 children.

11. DEATH IN CUSTODY

There were 2 deaths in the Midlands Prison in 2016 and the Visiting Committee extends our deepest sympathy to the bereaved families.

12. INDUSTRIAL AREA/WORKSHOPS

The Midlands Prison provides a number of workshops offering employment and training for a number of prisoners during their time in prison.

12.1 Certification

<i>Area</i>	<i>Accreditation</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Welding Unit</i>	<i>City & Guilds</i>	<i>24 Certificates completed with many more at various stages of engagement</i>
<i>Laundry</i>	<i>SQA</i>	<i>7 prisoners completed the Guild of Launderers Certificate programme</i>
<i>Industrial Cleaning</i>	<i>City & Guilds</i>	<i>35 prisoners engaged at various stages of engagement</i>
<i>Building Skills</i>	<i>City & Guilds</i>	<i>25 prisoners at various stages of completion including 4 having passed the diploma stage</i>
<i>Horticulture</i>	<i>QQI</i>	<i>19 prisoners have engaged at level 3 and 4</i>

13. VISITING COMMITTEE INITIATIVES

13.1 Cell Visits

The committee visited a number of cells on one of their visits, in order to view the living and sleeping conditions of prisoners. We visited the one-man and two-man cells and were satisfied with what we saw on our visit.

13.2 SafeTalk Program

Safe Talk is a short training program that provides the tools to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and trains people how to respond in such situations. Having seen the increasing awareness of mental health issues within the overall prison population, the Midlands Visiting Committee suggests that it would be extremely helpful for prison staff to undertake this short training program. This suggestion has been made to Governor Gavin of the Midlands Prison authorities who agreed to explore the area of support around suicide awareness for staff. Further information about the Safe Talk courses was subsequently provided by the Visiting Committee to the prison authorities to assist them in this.

14. VISITING COMMITTEE VISITS BETWEEN PRISONS

Members of the Visiting Committee from Limerick Prison visited the Midlands Prison on September 13th 2016. Two members of our own Visiting Committee attended the visit. The Limerick V.C. members reported that they found their visit very informative and enjoyable, thanking the Midlands in this regard.

Members from the Midlands Visiting Committee visited the newly-opened Cork Prison on September 22nd. We found the Cork prison to be very impressive, noting how it had to be shoe-horned into a very restricted site. The visit also served to highlight, by contrast, the very positive features of the Midlands, especially given the number and category of prisoner in the Midlands Prison. The Visiting Committee sincerely thanks all who made this visit possible.

15. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we acknowledge the sustained effort made by management and staff in the Midlands Prison in the provision of safe custody to the prison population in their care. We are particularly impressed with the aspects of the offender management program that we have witnessed – especially in those areas of work, training and education.

The Midlands Visiting Committee would like to thank all the governors and staff in the prison for their assistance and co-operation throughout the year. We would also take this opportunity to wish Governor Martin Mullen every good wish on his retirement, and welcome Governor Ethel Gavin, with whom we look forward to working in 2017.

We offer our sincere condolences to the family of the late Mr. Justice Michael Reilly, Inspector of Prisons, who passed away in November 2016.

We gratefully acknowledge the help and support provided to us by Caroline Allen, Governor's Secretary during the year. In particular, we appreciate her help in compiling many of the figures included in this report.

Finally, two members of the Visiting Committee retired in October this year. We wish to sincerely thank Ted Laffey for his tireless work as a member and Chairperson of the Midlands Visiting Committee and also Margaret O'Dwyer for her commitment and interest whilst serving as a member.

We welcome Derek Mulcahy and Anna Tuohy-Halligan who both joined the Visiting Committee in 2016.

We look forward to again working alongside all in 2017.

Joe Leahy (Chairperson)

John Kelly

Derek Mulcahy

Anna Tuohy-Halligan

March 2017