

Portlaoise Prison,  
Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois.

Mr. Michael McDowell, T.D.  
Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform,  
72-76 St. Stephens Green,  
Dublin 2.

## Visiting Committee Annual Report 2004

We the members of Portlaoise Prison Visiting Committee are pleased to present our annual report for the year ending 31/12/2004.

The Committee meet on the first Tuesday of each month throughout the year. Two members are nominated at each meeting to visit the prison unannounced during the month. During these visits we visited various areas of the prison and made ourselves available to prisoners. Prisoners are aware that we visit on the first Tuesday of each month and are encouraged to see the Committee if they have a problem.

We have been critical over the years about the general conditions that prevail in the prison. Lack of incell sanitation, especially where more than one prisoner shares a cell with another is degrading. D Block which was condemned as being unfit to house prisoners over forty years ago is still being used for that purpose.

There are major works starting inside the prison walls and parts of the grounds are now closed while the renovations are in progress. A new cell block to incorporate all services is being built so that E Block can be renovated. Unfortunately this work will take at least three years to complete. In the meantime conditions will deteriorate even worse than they are at present.

The overall health of the prisoners is good. We are glad to see that a fulltime doctor has been appointed to the prison. This is a vast improvement on the situation which pertained in previous years. Nurses and medical orderlies are on duty 24 hours daily. A dentist, optometrist and chiropodist visit the prison as required and provide an excellent service.

A new temporary education unit has been constructed. The old education unit has been demolished to make way for the construction of the new education unit and C Wing. Education facilities remain dispersed throughout the entire prison. Despite these problems the education service provided to prisoners through the Laois VEC is excellent. The courses are varied and are availed of by a large number of prisoners. There are twenty five full-time and part-time Laois VEC teachers and six teachers from NCAD providing a comprehensive education programme in the Prison. Great credit is due to the teaching staff who work under difficult circumstances.

The highest possible standards apply in the kitchen in Portlaoise. The Committee have not received a single complaint from prisoners re the standard of food this year. The food was sampled regularly by the Committee and was found to be of top quality. The staff in the kitchen have to be complimented for the high standards in the preparation, cooking and distribution of the food

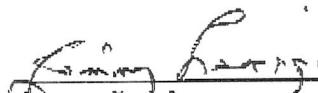
The conduct of the prisoners overall during the year was good. There was a dispute on two of the landings involving the Real IRA. They were protesting about conditions attached to a prisoner who was granted temporary release to attend his mother's funeral. As a result of the protest they were awarded 14 days loss of remission and a forfeiture of all privileges for a period of one month. They ended their protest after negotiations with the Prison Authorities.

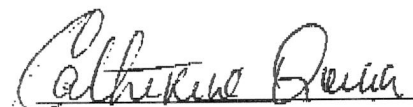
The Chaplain Father Drumm carries out his duties under extremely difficult circumstances. We presume that when the new building is complete he will have a designated area in which to conduct services.

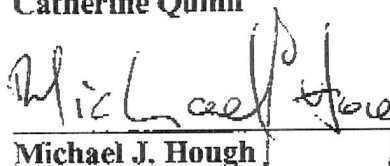
The Probation and Welfare service carry out a very important service for prisoners. This is a very essential service and helps the Prison Management deal with the many problems prisoners have on the outside.


To sum up our report, we are optimistic that when the new building programme is completed we will have modern prison accommodation for prisoners. It is a pity that some of our recommendations, made over the last few years to modernise the buildings were not acted upon. As matters stand it will take some years to bring the new building programme to conclusion. In the meantime conditions will have to remain as they are.

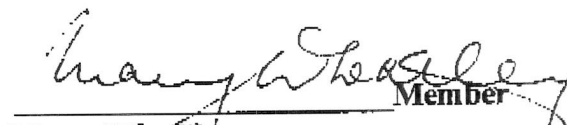
To conclude our report, we would like to thank the Governor and his staff for their courtesy and help extended to us on our visits throughout the past year.

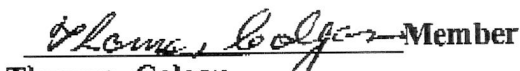
 Chairman  
James Lanigan

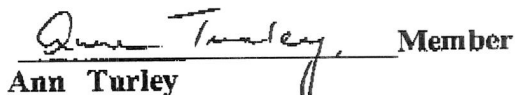
 Member  
Catherine Quinn

 Member  
Michael J. Hough

 Member  
Eilish Croke

 Member  
Mary Wheatley

 Member  
Thomas Colgan

 Member  
Ann Turley