

Limerick Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2014

The 2014 Annual Report of the Limerick Visiting Committee is presented on behalf of the 6 members of the Committee

The Members of Limerick Prison Visiting Committee having been appointed by The Minister have carried out their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the duties and powers as set out in the Prisons (Visiting Committees) Act 1925 and in the rules made in the Prisons (Visiting Committees) Order 1925.

Limerick Prison is a remand and committal prison for male prisoners from Counties Clare Limerick and Tipperary and for female prisoners from the 6 Munster Counties.

A closed medium security prison the operational capacity of Limerick Prison is 220 males and 28 females. The Inspector of Prisons Bed Capacity is 185 males and 24 females.

The committee held monthly and interim meetings during the year.

Members attended the annual training day for Members of Visiting Committees at Brian Stack House and again found this training to be extremely beneficial and a welcome development.

The visit to Castlerea afforded an opportunity to compare the regime of an “open” versus a medium secure facility.

Limerick Prison is an exceptionally busy prison with constant movement of prisoners whether to court, other prisons, hospital, by committal from the community and discharge to the community. The admissions office also deals with persons presenting or being presented on foot of an arrest warrant for the non-payment of fines. Management of this constant movement places additional pressure on the Governor and his staff. Implementation of the proposed legislative changes in respect of court fines should see the numbers presenting on foot of warrants reduced significantly resulting in officers being available for other duties.

We have observed the team work necessary to maintain high standards, good working relationships and an atmosphere of calm co-operation essential for the efficient management and running of the prison. We are concerned that the increasing workload involved particularly in transporting prisoners to court appearances, other places of detention and hospitals may on occasions be having a detrimental impact on the provision of rehabilitative services. We have had excellent co-operation from all officers during our interaction with them and in particular during our visits to different areas of the prison.

Numbers in custody.

31st December 2014	Male 190	Female 25
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Overcrowding continues to be a concern. The situation is constantly monitored and reviewed. Prisoner management including transfers to other prisons assists in resolving overcrowding, however this is a short term rather than a long term solution. Prisoner Management involving the transfer of prisoners to other prisons with capacity may not be in the best interest of the family of the prisoner. This practise also places additional pressure on the staff. It is however essential as a short term solution as it relieves the pressures that overcrowding generates. On the positive side it can also enable better planning and management of prisoner's sentences.

The committee met with male and female prisoners both at prisoner's requests and during visits to various areas of the prison.

A number of concerns were raised and in general these were resolved to the satisfaction of both the prisoner and the committee. Requests for transfers to other places of detention, complaints re positive indications by the OSG dog, difficulties with medical treatment/consultants appointments were among the complaints.

This year again there were a number of complaints re community prescribed medication not being made available by the prison medical officer.

The formalised complaints procedure is working.

There were 5 category A complaints initiated and officially investigated.

3 of the complaints having been investigated were not upheld.

1 complaint was well grounded but the officer gave a satisfactory answer for his behaviour.

1 complaint is on-going.

1 complaint was inadmissible and remains unresolved.

There were a number of serious prisoner on prisoner assaults.

There was one prisoner on officer assault.

The members of the committee have noted the behaviour pattern of prisoners and while every assault is unacceptable members welcome the low level of incidences during 2014.

There was one incident involving misuse of a domestic product. This involved a number of prisoners, all of whom were on the Enhanced Regime Initiative and who have lost the privileges associated with involvement in this initiative as a result of their actions.

Death in Custody

Regrettably one prisoner died in custody and to his family we extend our deepest sympathy.

Protection Prisoners

The committee has noted that there has been no improvement in the number of Protected Regime Prisoners and this is certainly a cause of concern. The high numbers impact on the committal landing/process and is something that must be addressed. The members of the Visiting Committee are fully cognisant of the circumstances and the need for a Protected Regime and are satisfied that

the Governor and his team are constantly endeavouring to improve the circumstances of these prisoners.

Female Prison

The members of the committee welcome the publication of the Irish Prison Service Women's Strategy 2014-2016 and looks forward to its implementation. The prison sentences that females are serving in Limerick Prison vary and range from long periods to periods of short duration.

The training and range of activities available for females has improved but need to be expanded on and the committee believes that courses of a short duration and tailored towards assisting short term inmates have the potential to be both effective and of long term benefit to the prisoner.

Family Relationships

The committee welcomes the work done on creating a more family friendly visiting regime. We are aware of the potential difficulties associated with introducing the new arrangements but believe that the bond between children and their parents must be nurtured and protected and this in our opinion was not possible in the previous visiting environment.

This initiative recognises that while the offender may have been found guilty of an offence requiring detention it is not in the long term interest of the family to have an over restrictive visiting regime.

The changes have been welcomed by prisoners and it is hoped that it will impact not only on the general behaviour of detainees but will be of assistance in maintaining the family unit.

Initiatives and Programmes

The Incentivised Regime scheme introduced during 2012 continues to deliver results. The number of Disciplinary Reports continues to decline and the prisoners are anxious to participate. Prisoners have advised the committee that they are happy with this approach and fully understand the consequences for them of failure and thus are anxious to succeed and continue participation.

Basic	Standard	Enhanced
4%	65%	31%

All 5 Prisoners granted temporary release over the Christmas period returned.

Limerick Prison has a good working relationship with a number of Statutory and Non-Governmental Agencies and as a result are implementing a number of initiatives which are of benefit not alone to the prisoners but also their families and the general community.

Release Programmes such as the Community Returns are in operation and supervised by the Probation Service. This particular programme enables a structured supervised return by a prisoner to the community.

The Community Services Scheme (sentence of less than 1 year) operated in partnership with PALS Limerick is a valuable initiative. A care plan is put in place in conjunction with and following consultation with PALS and the prisoner is released. This is an extremely valuable support for a prisoner returning to the community and can be of assistance in preventing re-offending.

Listener Project

The Visiting Committee are disappointed that due to unforeseen difficulties in recruiting and training personnel the Samaritans were unable to role out this project during 2014.

Gaisce Award

The involvement of prisoners in the Gaisce Award will commence in January 2015.

The Probation Service continues to work with the Governor and staff to ensure that prisoners are equipped to re-enter the community. Specifically the committee applaud the efforts to ensure that prisoners returning to the community have accommodation and access to Department of Social Protection allowances if required.

Work parties working in conjunction with the probation service have been successfully involved in delivering a number of community projects.

Progress continues in the implementation of The Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) Programme. It is imperative for the success of this programme that the outstanding vacancy is filled at the earliest opportunity.

The Family in Prisons Group (FIG) is progressing and it is anticipated that the Mental Health Awareness programme will commence during 2015.

A very successful ceremony was held in the Prison to mark the awarding of over 20 certifications of completion of the Irish Red Cross programme. The families of the participants, The Director General of I P S, Irish Red Cross Officials, The Inspector of Irish Prisons and V C members were amongst the attendees to mark the achievements of the participants on what was a very enjoyable day.

Education and Training

Plans to develop an area where horticulture can become an activity are coming to fruition and the first tunnel is now in place.

Existing training, up-skilling and educational services are provided to a high standard for those prisoners availing of them and who are acquiring recognised qualifications.

Medical Services

The medical centre continues to provide an excellent service in all disciplines.

In the interest of the service provided at Limerick Prison the on-going National Negotiations on hours worked by the Medical Doctor needs to be brought to a conclusion as soon as possible.

Substance abuse and the availability of illicit drugs within the prison despite the best efforts of the Governor and his staff is extremely worrying and undermines the efforts of all those involved in providing support and counselling services.

The members of the committee are concerned that there is not an OSG dog on full time duty at the prison during all visits.

The members of the visiting committee consider it absolutely essential that medical cover is available at the prison 24hours a day 7days a week.

The committee acknowledges the support provided by HSE hospitals, facilities and staff.

Building Programme

The lack of progress with the Women's Prison building programme is a cause of concern. Members of the Visiting Committee are disappointed at the lack of progress in bringing this essential building on stream. The existing Women's Prison cannot be upgraded any further and it is imperative that work is progressed on the new build as matter of urgency.

Prison General

The committee has visited every area of the prison. Visits have been unplanned and areas are picked at random.

The library is well stocked.

The training and education areas are well maintained.

There is a constant high standard of cleanliness throughout the prison.

The committee have visited the kitchens, tasted the food in the kitchen and have attended at various serving stations where prisoners expressed satisfaction with both the standard and quantity of the food provided. The committee has noted that dietary requirements whether medical and or arising from religious beliefs are catered for on a daily basis.

The tuck shop continues to be highly rated by the prisoners and in particular the efforts the staff go to source special items for them.

The landings are maintained to a high standard.

The committee recognises that the physical layout and design of Limerick Prison while improved and modernised is that of a penal institution of the 1800's.

The committee welcomes the additional planting and greenery now visible in a number of areas within the confines of the prison. This development has been well received by prisoners.

Limerick Prison Staff are continuing to work in a changing environment and the committee would like to recognise the commitment of the Governor and all of the staff to making sure the new systems work.

The committee appreciate the work that Prison Administrative Support Officer (PASO) Diarmuid Cahill does on behalf of the committee.

We would like to thank Governor O'Brien who has been nominated by Governor Dawson to liaise with the committee for his support and co-operation. His assistance and that of fellow officers has been of considerable benefit to the committee in ensuring that concerns and queries are dealt with efficiently.

Patricia McCarthy

Chairperson

Limerick Visiting Committee.

07/01/2015