

# **VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2014**

## **MIDLANDS PRISON**

## CONTENTS

Topic	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. PRISONERS' REQUESTS	4
2.1 <i>Missing Property</i>	4
2.2 <i>Health Care Issues</i>	5
2.3 <i>Inter-Prison Transfer Requests</i>	5
2.4 <i>Tuck Shop</i>	5
2.5 <i>Remission Requests</i>	5
2.6 <i>Courses/Work Requests</i>	5
3. SENTENCE MANAGEMENT	6
4. PROBATION SERVICE	6
4.1 <i>Living with Life Programme</i>	6
4.2 <i>Toastmasters Club</i>	7
5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS	7
5.1 <i>Independent Living</i>	7
5.2 <i>Lifers' Garden</i>	7
6. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE	7
7. MEDICAL SERVICES	7
8. EDUCATION	8
8.1 <i>Curriculum</i>	8
8.2 <i>Participation</i>	8
8.3 <i>Accreditation</i>	8
8.4 <i>Red Cross Community Based Health &amp; First Aid Programme</i>	8
8.5 <i>GAISCE Award</i>	9
8.6 <i>Other Areas</i>	9
9. LIBRARY	9

## CONTENTS

Topic	Page
10. PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE	9
11. CHAPLAINCY	10
12. MIDLANDS VISITOR CENTRE	10
13. DEATH IN CUSTODY	10
14. KITCHEN	10
15. INDUSTRIAL AREA/WORKSHOPS	11
<i>15.1 Welding Shop</i>	11
<i>15.2 Industrial Cleaning Workshop</i>	11
<i>15.3 Building Skills Workshop</i>	11
<i>15.4 Kitchen</i>	11
<i>15.5 Horticulture</i>	11
<i>15.6 Laundry</i>	11
16. HORTICULTURE	12
17. TUCK SHOP	12
18. VISITING COMMITTEE TRAINING DAY	12
19. CONCLUSION	13

## **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 and Westmeath.

The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee have a function of ensuring 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 2014 consisted of three members: Colette Fennelly, Margaret O'Dwyer and Ted Laffey. The committee meets in the prison on the second Thursday of every month whereby we conduct our monthly meetings and meet with any prisoners requesting to see us. Also two members visit on one other visit during that month and if requested by prison management on other occasions which are very rare.

On our many visits, during the year 2014, we listened to prisoner complaints, concerns 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 say that 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 a priority.

## **2. PRISONERS' REQUESTS**

In 2014, the committee met with 38 prisoners during the course of the year and heard all concerns presented to them by the prisoners. We mention some of the issues raised at our meetings below:

- Missing Property
- Health Care Issues
- Inter-Prison Transfers
- Tuck Shop
- Remission Requests
- Courses/Work Requests

### *2.1 Missing Property*

Due to the high number of inter-prison transfers we had some complaints from prisoners of clothing and other personal articles being misplaced or lost. In our investigations, we found that the prison, having conducted inquiries, have either located /replaced items or have explained how certain items are not allowed in the Midlands Prison.

## *2.2 Health Care Issues*

A small number of prisoner were unhappy with medical care. They had issues regarding doctors visits as it did not appear possible to always get an appointment with them.

The committee is satisfied that the health care team is providing a satisfactory service with the resources currently in place. We are happy to hear that a further full time doctor has joined the team during the year. This should alleviate the queuing time for prisoners.

## *2.3 Inter-Prison Transfer Requests*

During the year a number of prisoners requested transfer to open-prisons. Having discussed these requests with the Governor the committee is satisfied that proper procedures are being followed in considering such requests.

## *2.4 Tuck Shop*

A number of prisoners were unhappy with the prices of items from the tuck shop. The committee is satisfied that the Midlands Prison tuck shop does not have control over pricing. The committee feels that the cost of items available from the tuck shop be reviewed by Irish Prison Service [IPS].

## *2.5 Remission Requests*

A number of prisoners spoke with the committee regarding applications for one third remission under Rule 59 of Prison Rules. Having discussed the requests with the prison authorities the committee is satisfied that the procedure with regard to applying for and processing requests is working well.

## *2.6 Courses / Work Requests*

Due to the high level of demand for places on courses and work placements and the limited number of places available, it was not always possible to facilitate all requests from prisoners. Indeed, the high level of demand for placements is a testament to the excellent work being done in providing courses work activity in the prison.

### **3. SENTENCE MANAGEMENT**

Prisoner applications for temporary release and transfers are considered on an on-going basis. The Midlands Prison conduct a monthly review meeting attended by a Prison Operations Official, Prison Governor and Heads of Functions - Chief, Chaplain, Work & Training and Education in order to access applications and agree suitable prisoners for early release and transfers to open centres.

### **4. PROBATION SERVICE**

The prison service and the probation service have a long history of working in partnership in managing persons convicted of offences who are committed to prison. Child and community protection continues to be to the forefront of the probation services. The visiting committee acknowledges that the probation service continues to engage with community based services both statutory and voluntary and more recently are carrying out assessments and organising placement work in conjunction with their community based colleagues and prison management for the Community Returns Programme.

The probation service in conjunction with IPS have developed the Living with Life Programme, for life sentenced prisoners. This focuses on the development of a forum to allow men serving a life sentence equip themselves with adequate information and skills to serve their life sentence in a positive and social manner.

#### *4.1 Living with Life Programme*

The Living with Life Programme consists of the following three components:

- A. Life Seminars - Monthly seminars pertaining to issues relevant to a life sentence are offered to men serving life and long term sentences. Seminars have been offered in relation to subjects such as family and from agencies including Psychology, the Parole Board, and the Director of the Prison Service.
- B. Lifestyle Choices Group-work Programme - A 3 day group work programme is offered that explores positive lifestyle choices in a life sentence. Areas such as goal setting and sentence plan are explored in detail.
- C. Life Forum - The life forum is a meeting forum which consists of life representatives, prison management representatives (Governor, Chief Officer, and Assistant Chief Officer), Probation representatives and Psychology representatives. The forum meets on a monthly basis to consider issues relevant to a life sentence. In 2014 the development of a life garden has been established as a result of the life forum. This initiative sees life sentence men in the process of renovating a derelict grounds area of the Prison into a green area that will be available to life sentence men. A life sentence charity football tournament was also arranged which resulted in funds raised by the men for Autism Ireland.

#### *4.2 Toastmasters Club*

A further development from the Life Forum was the establishment of a Toastmasters Club in the Midlands Prison for life sentenced prisoners. Toastmasters is an international organisation. The mission of a toastmasters club is to provide a mutually supportive and positive learning environment in which every individual member has the opportunity to develop oral communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and personal growth. The club meets every second week and members prepare and present speeches as well as discussing various topics introduced on the club night.

### **5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

The Living with Life Programme identified particular needs of prisoners serving life sentences arising from a talk from a prisoner who had served 14 years, mostly in the Midlands, and who had transferred to the Training Unit a year previously. He gave a very informative and interesting talk on what it was like adjusting to the semi-open environment in the training Unit. He outlined how he continued to find it extremely difficult to adjust to communal eating. He had spent 14 years eating all meals alone and was uncomfortable with his social skills when dining in company.

The second big adjustment was reconnecting with nature. He had not walked on grass in 14 years or touched a flower. He was amazed at what the simple pleasures of walking on grass or observing wildlife meant to him.

#### *5.1 Independent Living*

The prison decided to initiate Independent Living on Division B3 where prisoners are only locked in cell at night and for lunch. Communal dining is available to them for breakfast and tea. A fitted kitchen was installed along with a bench table with a microwave, toaster, sandwich maker and fridge. The committee visited the landing and spoke with prisoners who were extremely positive about the initiative. Great credit and praise is due to all concerned with this excellent initiative.

#### *5.2 Lifers' Garden*

The authorities have also started a Lifers' Garden and plan to have a lawn, shrubs and flowers accessible to all lifers by spring/summer 2105. The committee looks forward to this development come to fruition in the year to come.

### **6. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

The new Complaints Procedure has been rolled out in the prison. All prisoners have the right to make a complaint at any time and all complaints are treated with the upmost seriousness. Complaints can vary in nature. Some may relate, for example, to conditions of accommodation, quality of food or access to services. Other complaints can be more serious such as allegations of assault, mistreatment or intimidation. Prisoners wishing to make written complaints should do so without delay by filling out one of the Complaint Forms and putting it in one of the Complaint Boxes located throughout the prison.

The Governor will arrange for prisoners, for whom English is not their first language, to get someone to help, translate and complete the form.

## **7. MEDICAL SERVICES**

The Midlands Prison Medical Services comprises two full time doctors and a staffing of 20 qualified nurses to care for the diverse needs of the prisoners. Dental Care, Chiropody, Drug Counsellors, Psychiatric Care and Optical Clinics are provided on an ongoing basis.

The level of care shown to all prisoners in their care is second to none and we highly commend the medical team.

## **8. EDUCATION**

### *8.1 Curriculum*

The Midlands Prison Education Unit offers a wide curriculum covering such areas as English, Mathematics, the Humanities, Computer Studies, Material Technology, Home Economics, Physical Education, ESOL, Languages Arts, Crafts, Music, Multimedia, Ceramics, Drama, Educational Guidance and Horticulture.

### *8.2 Participation*

There are over 400 hundred 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.

### *8.3 Accreditation*

Accreditation is offered for Junior and Leaving Certificates, FETAC Levels 1 to 5, Royal Irish Academy (Music) and the Open University.

There were 237 FETAC folders submitted for external assessment in 2014 as follows:

Level 1: 5	Level 2: 32	Level 3: 140	Level 4: 37
Level 5: 23	Junior Certificate: 4	Leaving Certificate: 17	

### *8.4 Red Cross Community Based Health & First Aid Programme*

There is also a significant educational input into the Red Cross Community Based Health & First Aid Programme, running in the prison since January 2014. The programme is a partnership between the Irish Red Cross, Irish Prison Service and Education & Training Boards. It is delivered by teachers and nurses employed in the Midlands Prison.

Evaluation of the programme highlights that all prisoner volunteers expressed views of being personally empowered and as having recognised changes in themselves directly as a result of the programme.



### *8.5 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. Members of the visiting committee were invited to and were delighted to attend the award's ceremony.

The programme has been running in the Midlands Prison since 2008. A total of 20 prisoners have completed their Bronze Medal Award to date, with 5 individuals being awarded Bronze Medals in 2014. The Bronze Award consisted of four challenge areas: Personal Skill; Community Involvement; Physical Recreation; and Group Activity. The first three challenges were successfully completed over a thirteen week period with the Group Activity completed over a further thirteen weeks. Various local and national charities have benefited from the programme with the Milford Hospice being this year's charity to benefit.

### *8.6 Other Areas*

Education, in the Midlands Prison, also offers Pre-Release and Anger Management Programmes. Other programmes offered include Toe by Toe and Touch Type Read & Spell. There are award ceremonies, drama productions, music concerts and other activities taking place from time to time.

The committee wishes to congratulate the five recipients on the award of the Bronze Gaisce Award in 2014.

## **9. LIBRARY**

There is a very well laid out library that appears to be well stocked. Prisoners from divisions A,B and D have access from Tuesday to Friday, in the evenings, while Divisions E, G and C are rostered for Sunday afternoons and evenings. The committee is concerned that staff shortages might impact on library operating hours and recommends that the prison authorities examine the possibility of training a prisoner in operating the library.

The library facility is also used by other groups, during the week, including toastmaster, drug awareness groups and first aid groups.

## **10. PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE**

The Psychology team in the Midlands Prison aim to respond to the mental health and offence related needs of those detained in the Prison. A defining characteristic of the population is the number of men serving long or indeterminate sentences. The service find this presents both challenges and opportunities to the team in meeting the services dual mandate of mental health and offence work.

The Visiting Committee would like to commend the Psychology team for their continued commitment in working with the increasing numbers in the Midlands Prison.

## **11. CHAPLAINCY**

The Committee found that the chaplaincy formed a vital part of the prison communities every day lives. They offer weekly masses, confessions and pastoral care to all divisions of the prison. Choirs and Readers are trained and prepared for the liturgies. Chaplains visit the Landings on a daily basis and are available to all prisoners who wish to speak to them privately or in a group. Chaplains maintain contact with family members especially during times of bereavement or serious sickness. Officers frequently direct chaplains to prisoners who are vulnerable or who are in particularly difficult circumstances. The chaplaincy also facilitates Bereavement Groups for those who experience bereavement while in prison.

## **12. MIDLANDS VISITOR CENTRE**

The Midlands Prison Visitor Centre offers a wide range of services for prisoners' families and friends. The visitor centre had identified them as a group who have not committed any crime, yet must cope with great difficulties in the outside world. In 2014, there were 28,246 visits to the prison by 47,932 adults and 12,901 children.

In addition to reception/general information including the following: tea bar facilities; childcare play area; support for families and children; train & bus timetables; information on prison visitation; a taxi free-phone service; information for children on first visits; ongoing activities and projects for families, community employment places; volunteer places; experience for students on work placement from colleges; staff and volunteer training & development; and a warm and welcoming environment for all.

The committee commends all involved in the visitor centre for their professional and caring approach to supporting those who visited friends or family, in the prison, during the year.

## **13. DEATH IN CUSTODY**

We were very pleased to note that there were no deaths in the Midlands Prison in 2014.

## **14. KITCHEN/CATERING**

The Committee commends the catering staff in the prison on the quality of food and hygiene standards maintained on an ongoing basis. Since the opening of the new kitchen in 2012 it has afforded the opportunity for employment and training for higher numbers of prisoners.

Committee members visited the kitchens and sampled the meals prepared. A 28 day menu cycle is in operation and it affords a wide variety of meals. The kitchen area was in excellent condition and the food sampled was of a very high standard indeed.

We congratulate the team on their exceptionally high scores on their annual food audits as more demands are made on the delivery of high quality service due to the increasing prisoner population. Prisoners working in this area receive training and accreditation/certificates in City and Guilds.

## **15. INDUSTRIAL AREA/WORKSHOPS**

The Midlands Prison provides a number of workshops which provide meaningful employment and training for a number of prisoners during their time in prison. The Carpentry, Metalwork, and Print Shops employ a number of prisoners on a daily basis.

### *15.1 Welding Shop*

Level 1 Introductory Welding Skills. There were 45 prisoners who attained certification in this process through City & Guilds

### *15.2 Industrial Cleaning Workshop*

City & Guilds 7139 - 01. There were 36 prisoners who attained certification in this process.

### *15.3 Building Skills Workshop*

Level 1 Award / Certificate Diploma in Basic Construction Skills. There were 13 prisoners registered for this course who had to await the external verification visit from City & Guilds before any certificates could be applied for. The visit took place on December 10th 2014 and the external verifier was extremely impressed with the work they were doing. Certificates will follow with possible diplomas for 4 prisoners.

### *15.4 Kitchen*

Basic and Proficiency Cooking Skills 3528 and 3529. There were 5 successful candidates involved in this course.

### *15.5 Horticulture*

FETAC levels 3 and 4 are delivered as a joint approach in conjunction with the education unit and 14 prisoners participated in level 3 and two in level 4. From this 5 have completed level 3.

### *15.6 Laundry*

The Midlands Prison has been approved to deliver the Guild of Launderers' Programme through the Scottish Qualification Authority and there will be 30 prisoners registered for this programme.

The laundry facility looks after the laundry needs of the entire prison and employs up to 20 prisoners on a daily basis. We commend the Industrial Manager and his staff in each of these workshops for their continued hard work in working with reduced resources and increasing prison numbers in the current climate.

The committee is delighted to report that the quantity and quality of work produced in the workshops is exceptional and would welcome the provision of any further access to

workshops for prisoners, that might be possible.

## **16. HORTICULTURE**

The Committee commends the horticulture staff and prisoners for keeping the complex beautifully maintained during all seasons. On all of our visits to the prison the gardens, flower beds, hanging baskets both externally and internally were immaculate and all areas are well kept.

Indeed, the Midlands Prison received an award, from the Portlaoise Tidy Town Committee in 2014, for the best landscaped and maintained public building.

The committee was particularly impressed with the on-going work in the horticultural/polytunnel area. The creative and inventive use of recycled materials is to be highly commended.

## **17. TUCK SHOP**

The committee was very impressed with the operation of the Bag & Tag Tuck Shop having visited the facility. The committee recommends ongoing training for prisoners working in the tuck shop with particular focus on courses in Stock Control; Information Technology; Manual Handling / Health & Safety; and Cardboard Baling.

The committee would also see a benefit from the introduction of a facility for prisoners to dine in the Tuck Shop area, similar to that which operates in the laundry area. This could increase both productivity and comfort for prisoners working in the tuck shop.

It was also suggested that the tuck shop could expand its role by attaching a bakery facility, where prisoners could produce and package biscuits for retail within the country's prisons. We feel that this initiative would be worth consideration by IPS.

## **18. VISITING COMMITTEE TRAINING DAY**

Members of the committee attended a training day in March 2014. The training took place in the Irish Prison Service College located in Brian Stack House, Portlaoise. The college provides all training within the Irish Prison Service.

The main focus on the day centered on respect for human rights in the prison context. It proved to be a very interesting and informative day. The committee looks forward to further training days. There was also a very impressive demonstration of how officers operate Control & Restraint within the prison. Indeed, prison officers from Ireland and abroad are trained in this approach in the college, such is the very high standard of training being provided.

The committee wishes to thank and compliment all involved in delivering the training.

## 19. CONCLUSION

We the Midlands Visiting Committee would like to thank Governor Moran who addressed us at our monthly meetings and kept us up to date and informed during the year and facilitated us at all times.

The committee extends its best wishes to Governor Malone on his retirement during the year and thank him for all his professionalism, dedication to duty and support to the Visiting Committees over the years.

We thank all the Management and Staff whom we met with during 2014 and who made themselves available and dealt with any issues we presented to them throughout the year. We would like to express particular thanks to Governor's Secretary, Caroline Allen [PASO], who was of great assistance to the committee.

Finally, the Committee wish to commend all the Staff and Services attached to the Midlands Prison for their continued work, commitment, dedication and their professional approach despite the ever increasing lack of resources during the current economic climate.

Effective teamwork helps to enhance the image of the Prison Service as a whole and greatly contributes to a healthy environment and good general atmosphere throughout the prison.

All are a credit to the Midlands Prison.

We look forward to again working alongside all in 2015.

---

Collette Fennelly (Chairperson)

---

Ted Laffey

---

Margaret O Dwyer

January 29th 2015