

Shelton Abbey Visiting Committee have pleasure in presenting their report for the year 2004

Shelton Abbey is an open Prison with dormitory type accommodation catering for 56 offenders. There are 2 prisoners serving life sentences and these have single room accommodation.

We held a total of 12 meetings this year, all of which were well attended. All members arrived early for each meeting and were available to meet with offenders and dealt with any queries at the meeting. As always a very good relationship was kept with offenders and other agencies within Shelton Abbey throughout the year.

The year started off as the previous year ended with a black cloud hanging over Shelton Abbey with threatened closure. This was not a good period for staff and offenders with all the uncertainty, and indeed caused a lot of stress for everybody involved.

The farm has been rented out for the last year, this was always a great source of employment for offenders and it is a pity that it was not continued to grow crops.

The Glasshouse which was completely refurbished this year was in full operation during the summer and used to grow some flowers and tomatoes. The gardens were as always kept in excellent condition. Each year the grounds staff and offenders cut timber to give to the needy in the Arklow area on behalf of St. Vincent de Paul.

The Education unit kept up its usual high standard of work throughout the year with large numbers of offenders attending classes. It is staffed by a Supervising Teacher who has 2 full time and 6 part time teachers giving day and evening classes, these consist of Woodwork, Art & Craft, Computers, French, Maths, Music, English, Literacy, Cookery, Physical Education and Pottery. It is hoped to have an exhibition in the coming weeks of the various crafts created by offenders. A large number of offenders successfully passed the Safe Pass Course which will enable them to work on building sites on their release.

During the school holidays offenders went hill walking with officers in charge on 16 occasions, also on 5 occasions they were brought by the Chaplain to Glendalough. A sports day was held in July which was a great success. Many of the offenders families attended and the officers set up a barbecue to provide food for everybody.

During the year there were a number of retirements among the staff in Shelton Abbey including the Governor Martin Corrigan who had been in charge for 16 years. He was a dedicated and compassionate man who always worked for the welfare of the prisoners as did his Assistant Governor Christopher Breen who had served 24 years in Shelton Abbey and also retired this year. A number of other staff retired this year including A.C.O. Dennis Byrne, Clerk11 John Meagher, Officers John Driver, Thomas Kinsella, Thomas Ryan, Patrick Collins all who had given long service to Shelton Abbey.

During the year the Chaplain Sr. Barbara Perry was replaced by Sr. Patricia Egan . She looks after the spiritual needs of the offenders and will make contact with their families when required. She at times takes offenders out on visits to their homes or to visit family graves.

Thankfully the dispute which arose between the Prison Doctors and the Prison Service was settled, It was a cause of great concern while it was ongoing. The Doctor attends daily to Shelton Abbey and meets with all committals on the day after their arrival. He will refer them for further medical attention as he deems necessary. The medical orderly looks after the other medical needs of offenders.

It came to our notice that there was no psychologist available to Shelton Abbey for some time and this was unacceptable as prisoners needing help were being returned to closed prisons to avail of this service. We have written to the Director General Mr. Brian Purcell about this issue and hope it will be resolved to the benefit of the prisoners.

Probation & Welfare Officer Catherine Doyle attends Shelton Abbey daily and caters for the welfare needs of offenders. She will assist them in making out employment applications and setting up interviews.

Review meetings are held monthly and each offender is discussed and recommendations are made as to their future. Decisions are made to grant offenders periods of Temporary Release. Heads of all agencies attend those meetings along with an Irish Prison Service official.

The kitchen was visited on regular occasions and as usual the standard of food supplied was excellent. The prisoners working there were given a hygiene course by the chef, and it was obvious as the place was shining. It again achieved the hygiene award this year. This is a source of great pride to all concerned.

The building is always kept clean and tidy and it is a credit to both staff and prisoners who take pride in the work that they do. The bedrooms were all painted this year and look very well at the moment.

There were over 360 prisoners transferred here during the year and while it was great to keep the place open that amount of a turnover is not good for the Education Unit in that they are unable to keep up with providing stable programmes for a large amount of prisoners because of the short time some of them spend here. When first set up Shelton Abbey was to have long term prisoners who in the last years of their sentence would come here and have definite programmes set up for them. It would be good to have that process reinstated.

Finally we would like to thank Governor Liam Dowling, Asst. Governor Christopher Breen, Chief Officer Teresa Mc Cormack and Clerk1 Bernard Quinn for all their assistance during the year.

Patrick Fitzgerald

Collette Douglas

Kevin Fitzgerald

John Murphy

John Byrne

Oonagh Doyle

Hugh O’Keeffe

Pat Doran

Kathleen Maher

P. J. Sheridan