

Summary of Prison Visiting Committees Annual Reports 2015

Arbour Hill:

The Committee note that the standard of hygiene and the cleanliness throughout every part of the prison is exemplary, the physical environment is maintained to a very high standard and the prison environs are described as spotless. The Visits area was renovated to a very high standard in 2015.

One prisoner sought formal meetings with the Committee in 2015.

The Committee praise the Chaplain for his support and encouragement to all as well as the work of the Probation Service. There is also praise for the library and the Catering Department which provides valuable training and high quality food.

Concerns were raised regarding the reduction in Psychology staff which has placed additional pressures on the service and the fact that there is no doctor in the prison at the weekend which is an issue given the number of very old prisoners who require high medical support.

The Special Observation Room was used once during the year. There was one death in custody in 2015. Of note is the fact that there were no incidents of drug use or suicide attempts during the year. Good progress is being made with Integrated Sentence Management and its positive contribution to reintegration and risk management in the post release scenario along with the Building Better Lives Programme is acknowledged.

As with previous reports, the Committee highlight the need for supportive transitional accommodation to facilitate re-integration of prisoners back into society.

Castlerea:

Staffing levels have improved. The number of attempted non-serious suicides has reduced which the Committee state is mainly due to the facilities on C1 landing which accommodates those who are most vulnerable and suffer from mental health issues. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the staff involved in saving the attempted suicides.

In addition to the prisoners the Committee has met in the course of their visits to the prison there was some written requests and several prisoners requested to meet the entire Committee. The small number of prisoners requesting to see the Committee is taken by them as an indication of how well the prison is being run.

There is praise for the local GP who attends Monday to Friday and at any other time called to the prison. The level of care offered to prisoners is second to none at a time when the numbers in custody is increasing putting extra pressure on the staff providing services i.e. dentist etc. The Committee also praises the Chaplain for her work with the prisoners.

The work in the school area is acknowledged and there is a very high level of interest in the classes provided, with some classes over subscribed. There is a high standard of education and work and training provided to all prisoners. All workshops, education and the gymnasium are designated safe free zones under the Red Cross programme. This allows for a much greater take up by prisoners in these facilities. Further programmes in mental health education for prisoners are being considered for the prison.

The prison provides a wide range of training within a production Kitchen. This training ranges from elementary cookery with City & Guilds Certificates and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. It is hoped to introduce a more advanced level of training.

The prison Tuck Shop is a resounding success. The prisoner complaints procedure is working well and prisoners have confidence in the procedure. Overall prisoners and staff have a good working relationship and the Committee's view is that the prison is very well run with professional and courteous staff.

Cloverhill:

The Committee note that the introduction of yard hubs does not protect prisoners as serious assaults have occurred. There is concern that the use of the hubs will lead to further serious incidents occurring.

Deportations continue to be housed in Cloverhill and the Committee reiterates their opinion that these prisoners should be held in a secure holding centre.

There was one prisoner fatality in 2015.

The Committee again highlights their disappointment that the passive drug detection dog is not used during the week. They also mention that there continues to be a substantial increase in the number of prisoners requesting protection on committal.

Video link continues to be an under utilised resource. The library is an excellent facility and the Committee request that a review of the services available in the library to cater for inmates with disabilities be undertaken. There is a large quantity of gym equipment in urgent need of replacement and it is hoped that money will be allocated to the prison in 2016 to resolve this issue.

There is no Psychologist in the prison and the Committee feel there is an urgent need for a full time one. Night nursing cover is to be reduced in 2016. Staff shortages impacting on the Education Unit are highlighted.

Finally, the Red Cross prison based programme has been up and running in the prison since 2010. The volunteers have raised community health and hygiene awareness and first aid in prison through peer to peer education.

Cork:

The completion of the new Cork Prison was a major highlight of the year with it being described as state of the art, modern, bright and spacious with a new family visiting area.

The good work by all staff on the handling of the State funeral of Thomas Kent, which was one of the highlights of the year for Cork prison, was acknowledged.

There was one death in custody in 2015.

A new dedicated Information Channel was piloted in Cork Prison in July 2015. This was later extended to three channels which are now displayed on the prisoner's TVs.

The Committee have praised the excellent service provided by the Prison Library and are pleased with the appointment of a new Chaplain. The kitchen scored 92.5% in the 2015 food safety audit. Praise is also given for the various workshops within in the prison.

The successful year at the Education unit is acknowledged including one of the English students winning a prize at the Listowel writer's week for writing a poem.

The Post Release Project continues to perform the vital and necessary service of working with homeless prisoners and prisoners who require support in the community in terms of addiction, tenancy skills, social welfare/medical care needs, further education and training. The various

Trusts and Groups working with the prisoners and their families are also acknowledged in the report.

The Committee refer to a number of issues raised in Judge Reilly's Review of the Prison Service including having on site, the necessary equipment to enable full body searches, the Department of Social Welfare having an officer attached to assist prisoners and the number of committals in relation to fines.

Dochas:

The Dochas Centre was visited by President Michael D Higgins and Mrs Higgins in 2015 which was very much appreciated.

The Committee welcome the improvements in the Centre. Innovative and progressive programmes have been rolled out during the past few years, many stemming from the Incentivised Regime Policy and earned Temporary Release. However a number of problems flagged in several previous reports remain e.g. overcrowding, drugs, imprisonment of mothers, homelessness, the difficulty in accessing addiction or counselling services on release,

Rooms are for the most part in good condition. Beds and mattresses in some cases are old and worn and should be replaced. Bed clothing and soft furnishings need to be upgraded. Some areas have been painted but the overall campus needs freshening.

The Committee noted that the School is a valued and very popular resource among the prisoners and every effort is made to provide a wide variety of practical courses tailored to the prisoners' needs. Occasionally the school, or part of it, is closed for several hours due to the temporary redeployment of Prison Officers who provide security in the school. This is causing frustration amongst the prisoners.

Furthermore, complaints have been received from the prisoners who have been approved for Temporary Release but have had this cancelled at the last minute due to staff shortages. Some complaints were received that hospital appointments were missed due to the unavailability of staff to take the mother or patient but the Committee acknowledge that this was not a regular occurrence.

A number of training courses are available but generally at the most basic level. Hairdressing and Sewing courses are ongoing for which City and Guilds accreditation is being sought. It is confidently expected that this will be achieved in the near future. Studies have been disrupted constantly because of internet access restrictions. The Committee have requested that the necessary protocols and security precautions are put in place to enable the prisoners to continue their studies with the least possible disruption while ensuring there is no breach of security.

The Committee again stress that the tuck shop prices are still too high and have requested that this long outstanding complaint is addressed.

The Health Centre has been working with a staff shortage. The Committee also comment that since February 2015, there has been no psychologist on site. Overall the Committee is complimentary of the common areas such as the Reception and outside areas which are being well kept and tended to.

The Committee note that the Centre is designed to accommodate 105 prisoners but on random checks undertaken the numbers regularly reached 120. Concern was expressed that this pattern of regular overcrowding will continue.

The issue of homelessness and accommodation on release as well as the difficulty in accessing supports and help post-release is still an issue. The Committee urge that this is adequately addressed.

The Committee have made alternative suggestions to the present system of the detention of women offenders. They acknowledge that the Department and the Irish Prison Service have embraced the need for change but suggest that more needs to be done at a greater pace.

The Committee urge that the research deemed necessary to shape the appropriate responses should be undertaken without delay, completed within a realistic but defined timeframe and the ensuing agreed outcomes and recommendations resources, supported and implemented.

The Committee has also asked that the Minister implement Recommendation 43 of the Strategic Review Group on Penal Policy Report 2014 which recommends that the Minister establish a mechanism to ensure the implementation of actions arising from the Strategic Group's report which would report to the Minister on a six monthly basis on such implementation. These reports should be published.

Limerick:

The Committee met with prisoners at their request with most of the complaints being resolved positively after being discussed with prison personnel.

The Committee are glad to see the ongoing training of staff to deal with prisoners and their families. The design and atmosphere in C block is now much improved. The visiting room has been redecorated and the family room is also available to prisoners on an enhanced regime.

The Parenting Plus programme facilitates prisoners and their partners in developing parental skills. To date eight prisoners have completed the course.

There were no complaints to the Committee from female prisoners in 2015. At the Committee's request, the female recreation room has been refurnished and the room is now homely, comfortable and appropriate to the prisoners' needs.

A number of improvements made to the prison in 2015 were acknowledged by the Committee.

Loughan House:

The Committee praise the very good condition of the grounds and environs of Loughan House and compliment everyone for their work in this regard. The Kitchen continues to deliver to a high standard and employs 12-15 inmates on a rotational basis providing an opportunity for prisoners to learn the art of catering.

The staff in the Education Unit and Work Training Workshops show a great interest in the prisoners and the teams are proactive in meeting the prisoner's needs. The library is well stocked.

There is praise for the good work of the Probation, Addiction Counselling and Chaplaincy Services. The Committee note that there is no night nurse cover and acknowledge that the Healthcare Department is an area that has been affected by cuts down the years.

The Committee refer to the charitable work undertaken by inmates in conjunction with Bóthar and the Rotary Clubs - Bikes for Africa. Later in 2016 there will be a ceremony in Loughan House to celebrate the 2000th bike to be refurbished.

Midlands

The Committee commend all the staff and services for their commitment, dedication and professional manner. During the year they met with 36 prisoners. Issues raised include:

Health care issues

The Medical Services are seriously under staffed.

Loss of Enhancement

A number of prisoners believed that they had unfairly lost their enhancement status. Having discussed this issue with the governor, the Committee were satisfied that fair procedures were followed.

Inter-prison transfers

The Committee is satisfied that the proper procedures are being followed in considering requests for transfer to other prisons including open prisons.

Missing property

The Committee found that if a prisoner's clothing is misplaced/lost due to the high number of inter-prison transfers, the prison will investigate and compensate the prisoner or explain how certain items are not allowed in the prison.

Prison Visits

A number of prisoners spoke with the Committee regarding visitors being barred and/or restricted to screened visits. Some prisoners were experiencing difficulty in securing visits from family members. Having discussed the issue with the prison authorities the Committee is satisfied that the decisions around visits are made in a fair, reasonable and proportionate manner.

Complaints

Concern was raised by some prisoners that there was undue delay in getting a response to official complaints made to the authorities. The Committee was satisfied that proper procedures were being followed in the prison regarding the processing of complaints.

The 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 Psychology Service is commended for their on going commitment in working with the ever increasing numbers in the prison. There is also praise for those involved in the visitor centre and the staff in Work and Training, horticulture and catering. The Care and Rehabilitation Directorate are complimented in their foresight, vision and financial support in equipping all the workshops and the updating of others, by replacing vital equipment.

There were 6 deaths in custody during the year.

During the year 2015 the prison authorities worked on introducing the Building Better Lives (BBL) Programme to the Midlands. Since 2009 the BBL programme has operated only in Arbour Hill prison. This proposal to extend offence focused interventions for those convicted of sexual violence across the two prisons is a collaborative initiative between the IPS and the Probation Service.

Mountjoy:

A number of the prisoners met by the Committee expressed concerns and made complaints about aspects of their life and treatment in prison. However, increasing numbers expressed satisfaction and were glad of the opportunity to avail of programmes available. The Committee made a written and oral submission to the Inspector of Prisons Report on the *Culture of Prisons* and attended the launch of the Report.

There were two deaths in custody in 2015.

The Committee commented on the dedication of staff and state that it would be helpful, and in the interest of prisoner welfare and rehabilitation, if additional staff were allocated to the prison.

The Committee note that the prison is frequently at 98% or 99% of its capacity. Refurbished accommodation has been undertaken with single cell use and will be opened in 2016 if new staff is available. Also noted is the committal of prisoners for non-payment of fines is using up resources.

The number of protection prisoners rose in 2015. More than one in four prisoners was reported to be under a restricted prison regime. Concern is expressed for the mental health of prisoners in the protection system and the Committee has requested that this situation be reviewed as a priority.

The Committee considers that the prison is not a suitable place of detention for prisoners with acute or chronic mental illness or psychological difficulties arising from addiction, brain injury or cognitive impairment.

The Committee note that a challenge to aspects of 'solitary confinement' of individuals or 'segregation' of individuals in the UK prison system was successful in an appeal to the House of Lords during 2015. Clarification has been requested as to whether the Court ruling on 'open exercise yards' of May 1 2015 has implications for Mountjoy prison.

Concern was expressed regarding media reporting of issues from within the prison with a view to the protection of the prisoner's right to privacy.

Participation in education programmes continue to show an increase. Throughout the year a number of special events were held in the schools. The Committee acknowledges and commends the professionalism and work of the teaching and prison staff and recognises the continued support of the Governor and management for education. They recommend that the investment in additional space for education be explored.

The Committee notes that illicit drug use is an upward trend in prisons in Europe. In this context the plan for more treatment places for prisoners in preparation in Mountjoy is a positive development. The Committee recommends education and drug risk awareness programmes for families which could potentially have positive benefit for all. Random appropriate testing and searching of prisoners, searches for visitors and staff need to be further researched, supported and resourced to focus on limiting inflow of illegal and dangerous substances.

Further and ongoing training is essential in order to equip staff to recognise the need to refer on and consult with management about individual prisoner health needs, to assess initial risk and to ensure safe care of prisoners and staff. The Committee also recommend staff support, oversight and training in mental health be further resourced and prioritised.

The Committee regards the ISM as a fundamental and powerful method of enabling prisoners to use their time in prison positively and prepare themselves for return to the community. Concern is expressed regarding staff resources and it is recommended that a comprehensive review of the ISM system with a view to developing appropriate effectiveness measures for the function and ensuring that it is adequately resourced.

Portlaoise:

The Committee met with a large number of prisoners throughout the year and were satisfied with the Governor's decision/action on each of the issues they subsequently raised with him.

The modern facilities in C Block are mentioned favourably by the Committee along with the assignment of new Work Training Officers - with a view to opening more workshops. However, the E Block is in a very bad state of repair and requires urgent works.

The Health Care staff is commended for the excellent care provided. The Catholic Chaplain and the Church of Ireland Minister continue to care for the spiritual needs of the prisoners. The full time Probation Officer addresses a wide range of issues such as offending behaviour, anger management, addiction and resettlement issues.

The Education Centre offers a broad choice of subjects at all levels and has an average enrolment of 250-260 prisoners throughout the year. The Education programme, projects and extra curricular activities are continuously evolving with extra projects developed and encouraged by the teachers including: Music and Song Writing, First Aid and Craft Workshop.

Assistance was provided to the Pre Release programme by visiting speakers from:

- Citizens Information Centre
- Linkage (Employment Issues)
- FAS
- Pathways
- Pace
- Addiction Centre

The report praises the Governor and his staff on their many achievements during the year and makes particular reference to the Industrial Supervisor (Kitchen) and his team who continue to produce and maintain very high standards on a daily basis.

Shelton Abbey:

The Committee met on a monthly basis during 2014. Of note is the fact that for the fourth year in a row no offenders made requests to see the Committee during the year.

The Committee acknowledged the excellent work and leadership of the prison staff and the centre continues to maintain and introduce new initiatives. 2015 witnessed a very notable increase in positive interaction with the community. The working relationship with The Wicklow Partnership was praised in, particular the Tinahely Show project.

A number of successful programmes were undertaken in 2015 including an eight week mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) programme was introduced. 23 prisoners completed the programme which was the first time the full eight week MBSR programme was completed in an Irish prison.

Ten offenders absconded in 2015 compared to eight in 2014.

A number of issues with regards accommodation were raised such as: a request to the Irish Prison Service to review the dormitory style accommodation in the Main Building; the shared toilet/shower facilities in the Main Building were listed to be refurbished but the project still awaits commencement.

The Education Centre continues to provide students with the opportunity to engage with a quality education service. QQI certified courses are delivered at Levels 3, 4 and 5. As part of the Horticulture programme a vegetable garden was developed in early 2015 which allowed the Outdoor Vegetable Crop Production component (QQI L3) to proceed. The total number of offenders enrolled for education courses in 2015 was 126.

Internet access continues to be a valued facility in 2015 with individual user accounts set up by IPS HQ and the local management. Internet Access was provided to the Librarian and is noted as a great addition to the service. It is hoped to continue to develop this facility in 2016. The Storybook Dads programme continues to support family literacy. Fathers read and record a children's story and a personal CD is then sent to their family.

The healthcare needs of offenders were well catered for. There were two incidents of note that required expert intervention of the medical team in 2015. One incident involved a suspected overdose and the other an attempted suicide. Both prisoners received immediate medical attention and have since recovered. The Committee has praised the medical staff for their expertise in dealing with the incidents. There continues to be no fulltime Psychologist in Shelton Abbey and they must depend on Psychologists from other prisons as the need arises. This situation was not reviewed in 2015.

The Probation Service continues to deliver a wonderful service to the prisoners and the Community Return Scheme (CRS) has been one of the most positive/progressive initiatives witnessed by the Committee. The Red Cross group continued to be very active throughout the year.

Finally, the Committee have noted that there has been a remarkable improvement in the facility in the last couple of years and feel that this should be developed further.

St Patricks Institution:

As St. Patrick's Institution is in a semi state of closure there is currently only one member of the Visiting Committee.

The Committee visited monthly and there was general positivity from the inmates when discussing conditions and a general reluctance to be moved to another facility.

The Committee state that there needs to be some clarity and certainty about the future of the Institution.

Training Unit

As there was no capital budget a programme of refurbishment of cells was initiated with the work carried out by the inmates utilizing their talents.

An Art Exhibition called Fallen Bird drew a large attendance to City Hall Dublin on 15th January which was attended by The Lord Mayor of Dublin Ald. Christy Burke and The Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald T.D.

A number of inmates expressed an interest in doing the HGV course and were accommodated.

During the month of June the manager of Bohemians F.C. presented certificates to 15 inmates who completed the soccer coaching course.

The Music Room is always very uplifting and provides the inmates with a good mix of opportunities to develop their individual skills in music and video editing and creation in between others. Individuals are encouraged to express themselves and their talents are developed and recognized.

From time to time the Committee received complaints about the functioning of the gym equipment. In general problems were attended to and service carried out periodically. Delays servicing kitchen equipment was also raised on occasion.

A Services Open Day took place on the 1st July and Committee members were invited to attend. This was a very open instructive forum attended by inmates and proved very enlightening to Committee members as it gave a good insight on services available when prisoners finish their sentences.

A plan was introduced for those attending external education programmes to contribute 10% of course fees as an incentive to completing the course. This plan was endorsed by the Committee and the initiative commended. The re-socializing of inmates prior to their daily release to college was also highly commended.

A six day STEPS programme was introduced to teach inmates soft life skills and instructing inmates in how to handle particular situations once outside the prison; candidates to attend to be selected by a multi-disciplinary committee.

The Comedy Club information evening was run in conjunction with Bohemians F.C. and was attended by one third of the prisoners and got off to a good start.

There is much activity in the Metal Workshop with inmates taking pride in their work. The Picture Framing Shop is going well. The Art Room continues to attract and develop talents as does the Computer Room. The grounds are tended well with some inmates working in the Officers Mess.

In October Mountjoy Training Unit's soccer team played a match at Dalymount Park against Bohemians F.C.. Committee members attended and a great day's entertainment was had by all. The Library is well stocked and welcoming.

The Gaisce awards were presented in November with many inmates attaining high marks, all governors and V.Cs within the Mountjoy Campus attended as well. The old folks in the local catchments area of the Training Unit were treated to a Christmas dinner cooked by the inmates themselves and the dinner was attended by local politicians and councillors. Committee members attended the Lifers Christmas Dinner with their families; a very enjoyable dinner was prepared and served by those inmates working in the kitchen under the direction of Mr. Furlong.

Wheatfield Place of Detention

Once again the Committee reports that Wheatfield is a well run facility but is in need of modernisation. Prisoner's cells conditions depend largely on which regime the prisoner finds himself on. The general condition of the communal areas of the prison is good. The Prisoner Committal Area is seen as a positive step in reducing the stress for prisoners arriving to prison.

The internal grounds have been well utilised and the external appearance of the public areas is being addressed. The Visiting Area is well maintained and over all works well. The Kitchen

and Laundry operate at a very high level. The Library service has improved and the workshop training units are highly professional. The Education facility operates many educational and training services. The workshop training units are of a highly professional level.

The Committee are of the view that all 17-18 year olds should be assessed to identify issues such as ADHD, Dyslexia etc. Courses in anger management and empathy would also be of benefit to this cohort of inmates. The possibility of expanding versions of the Building Better Lives Programme should be considered.

The level of physical activities is commended. The prisoner mail service is efficient. The usage of the different levels of regimes is a fair system

Drugs are an on-going concern. Drug free landings are on offer to prisoners who wish to avail, but drugs still end up on these landings. The committee feels that drug free landings are an important part of this strategy. Under no circumstances should prisoners that have not been cleared for these landings end up here.

The institution's authorities should continue their hard work in the eradication of drugs from Wheatfield. A new confidential phone line to report drugs in the prison has been set up and is a welcome addition in the battle against drugs.

The committee believes that the mental health care of prisoners on 23 hour lock up should be prioritised. Wheatfield Place of Detention has a number of inmates on 23 hour lock up and the committee feel that the prison authorities do try to encourage prisoners to come off this regime.

Prisoner violence and attacks are decreasing within the institution.

Finally, through hard work and good management, Wheatfield has remained an excellent institution. More investment is required to develop Wheatfield further. Staffing levels need to be looked at as the institution suffers when staff members are away on escorts etc.

Irish Prison Service (IPS) Observations

CLOVERHILL

Library

The Committee's comments regarding prisoners with disabilities are noted. The IPS relies upon prison staff to notify them of prisoners with disabilities who need to be catered for. The library provides a range of services to cater for prisoners with disabilities including: wide array of graded literacy books, talking books on CD, large print books and the full support of trained teachers if necessary.

Due to the short time slots available to prisoners in the library, there is not much scope for formal learning. However, formal education is provided by the prison school. The issue of restricted opening hours due to the unavailability of Prison Staff has been noted and has improved in 2016.

The co-ordinator of Library Services has agreed to make direct contact with the Committee to clarify their proposals to address the needs of disabled prisoners.

Gymnasiums

Following an audit of gym equipment, the IPS provided funds at the end of 2015 which has been used to replace several items of equipment. It is hoped that funds generated through the introduction of a cost saving chemical rollout can be used to purchase further equipment in 2016.

Healthcare

Psychology

A comprehensive proposal has been completed regarding the need for an IPS Psychology Service. A meeting will take place between the Governor and the Acting Head of Psychology to discuss the recommendations made.

GP Services

It is accepted that some prisoners have experienced delays in accessing GP services although this was for a short period only and is no longer an issue. Every effort is made to provide a continuity of care to all prisoners but there can be difficulties in securing locum services. This is common across the healthcare system and not specific to the IPS.

Nursing Services

The IPS has recently recruited nurses for vacancies at a number of locations. A further class of candidates will be assigned by mid 2016.

The IPS Healthcare plan, currently under discussion with the staff representative group, makes provision for an addiction nurse. The IPS will continue to monitor issues affecting the level of addiction counselling service provided.

DÓCHAS

School/ Education Centre

The IPS is currently developing proposals for an alternative regime management plan that would prioritise the deployment of staff resources to prisoners who wish to engage in structured activities. This will be piloted in one prison prior to its roll out to other prison sites.

Work Training

Following a review, the development of a restaurant to provide 'front of house training' will now not proceed. In March 2016, approval for a hairdressing programme was obtained from City and Guilds and progress is being made with regard to the certification of the sewing skills programme.

The concerns regarding internet access restrictions are noted and the IPS are working closely with the IT Department to ensure that access to essential course materials is not adversely affected.

Visiting Area

Under the exceptional needs payments arrangements of the Department of Social Protection, families of prisoners can apply for travel assistance payments in situations of hardship. Duration and number of visits is linked to the Incentivised Regimes Policy.

The Families and Imprisonment Group are piloting a full programme of positive family support interventions which included a parenting programme in Limerick Prison. This is under evaluation currently with a view to expanding to other prisons this year and next.

Healthcare

The IPS has recently recruited nurses for vacancies at a number of locations. A further class of candidates will be assigned by mid 2016.

A Psychologist has been reassigned to the Dochas and is currently going through a transition period. A Senior Psychologist post will be advertised in 2016.

Homelessness and Accommodation

In partnership with the Department of Social Protection, a weekly in-reach service is being provided. This service is invaluable for the successful resettlement of offenders and vital component of pre-release planning.

A new pre-release planning policy for the IPS will be published shortly and will represent considerable improvements to current pre-release planning and practises in Irish prisons. Furthermore, updates to the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) have been developed and will record a range of information with regards to post release concerns. This will improve transition to the community and reduce occurrences of ex-offenders becoming homeless.

A joint Women's Strategy document for the IPS and the Probation Service was published in April 2014 which addresses issues such as: rehabilitation, housing and reintegration. The Abigail Women's Centre opened in Finglas in December 2014 and represents a major contribution to the realisation of this strategy.

The IPS have been actively working through the Regional Homeless Consultative Fora as well as working directly with the Departments of Environment and Social Protection to provide an appropriate in-reach service to ensure that prisoners are assisted to find accommodation before release. A vital component of this is the role of the Irish Association for the Social Integration of Offenders (IASIO) who the IPS provides funding for. The IASIO Resettlement Service provides one-to-one support from the prison to the community under an overall objective of stable resettlement and reintegration. This service was extended to include the Dochas Centre in 2015.

The IPS has entered into a protocol with Louth, Cavan and Monaghan local authorities to assist in the planning and accommodation and resettlement supports for prisoners returning to that area on release from prison. This protocol is currently under evaluation with a view to improving the process in 2016.

MOUNTJOY

Recreation Facilities

The IPS provided funds for new gym equipment at year end 2015. A new gym on D Wing is expected to bring considerable respite to temporary arrangements in place.

Education Services

The IPS is currently working with the Education and Training Boards to develop a proposal to undertake a comprehensive study of prisoner literacy and broader competences along with a survey of the perception of prisoners of the education services provided.

Health and Medical Services

The objective of the IPS is to provide equivalence of care in relation to the provision of healthcare services comparable to that available to medical card holders in the community. During 2015, a mental health training programme for all staff was developed to be delivered over three years. Two locum psychologists began work in 2016.

The issue regarding the recommendation that the prison health service should be a responsibility for the Minister for Health has been noted and is currently under review by the IPS.

Integrated Sentence Management

A working group has been established to respond to Dr. Frank Porporino's review of the Psychology Service. A review of the ISM First Contact Assessment is already underway and changes to the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) have been implemented in 2015 to give greater effect to inter-agency cooperation in relation to more positive sentence management.

Pre-release Planning

A new pre-release planning policy for the IPS will be published shortly and will represent considerable improvements to current pre-release planning and practises in Irish prisons. Furthermore, updates to the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) have been developed and will record a range of information with regards to post release concerns. This will improve transition to the community and reduce occurrences of ex-offenders becoming homeless.

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Family Visits

The Families and Imprisonment Group are piloting a full programme of positive family support interventions which included a parenting programme in Limerick Prison. This is under evaluation currently with a view to expanding to other prisons this year and next.

