

VISITING COMMITTEE

MIDLANDS PRISON

ANNUAL REPORT 2018

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Midlands Prison is a closed, medium security prison for adult males. It is the primary prison in the country for convicted sex offenders and is the committal prison for counties Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Offaly, and Westmeath.

The Midlands Prison is the largest prison in the country with an operational capacity of 870. At the close of 2018, there were 824 prisoners in custody in The Midlands Prison.

The purpose of The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee is to ensure that all prisoners in the care of the Irish Prison Service at the Midlands Prison are treated fairly and humanely, with dignity and respect.

The Visiting Committee of the Midlands Prison in 2018 comprised the following members: Joe Leahy, Ted Laffey, John Kelly, Derek Mulcahy, Anna Tuohy-Halligan and Liam Ahearn.

The committee convenes in the prison to meet with any prisoner who requests such a meeting, and also to conduct our own internal meetings. Following investigation, we provide feedback to those prisoners on the issues raised by them. If requested to do so by prison management, the visiting committee will also visit the prison on other occasions. In addition, we conduct unannounced visit to the prison.

On our many visits during 2018, we met prisoners at their request and listened to their concerns, complaints 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,

Following our visits throughout 2018, the Visiting Committee agrees that the management and staff of the Midlands prison provide a fair and humane service to all prisoners in their care, and operate at all times with the prisoner's welfare at heart.

2. PRISONERS' ISSUES

The Midlands Visiting Committee met with 50 prisoners during 2018. This number represents an increase of some 28% over the previous year, when we met with 39 prisoners.

The issues raised by the Prisoners in 2018 included the following (in order of frequency):

- Prison Visits, bans and screens Access to Enhanced Regime and School
- Access to medical services
- Pre-Release issues
- Intimidation or Assaults by Other Prisoners
- Heating on D2
- Response to Complaints
- Missing Personal items

21 Prison Visits

The most significant issue — raised by 42% of those prisoners who met with the Visiting Committee, concerned prison visits — and in particular, the issue of screen visits. Following queries by the Visiting Committee, it was determined that in all the cases in question, screen visits were instigated following attempts by visitors to bring contraband into the prison.

A query was raised as to the possibility of inter-prison visits. This was deemed to be a matter for the Operations Director and an application was forwarded to him for decision.

The issue of delays in visits for Prisoner on Rule 62 (lock up) was raised. It was admitted that there is a time delay issue in relation to such visits but the Visiting Committee was assured that the prison authorities are working on rectifying same.

2.2 Access to Enhancement Regime and School

Some prisoners complained that they were not able to access the "enhanced regime". One, for example, had transferred from another prison and was on the basic regime. Prisoners were informed that enhancement is not an automatic "right" and that they must work towards enhancement. It is recognised however, that due to the limited resources and availability of jobs within the prison, there are constraints on the numbers of prisoners who can avail of both the school and the job opportunities within the prison, making it more difficult to access the enhanced regime.

This issue is one which is raised each year by the prisoners, but the Visiting Committee is satisfied that, although it is unfortunate that the resources are not available, fair procedures were followed in the allocation of prisoners on the enhanced regime.

2.3 Access to Medical Services

One prisoner claimed that he had requested a blood test and tetanus shot after a minor incident while working in the garden, but that it had not been acted upon. He was assured that viral testing is encouraged and that nursing staff would see him immediately to arrange same,

2.4 Pre-Release issues

Two prisoners expressed concern that they may be homeless on release. The Visiting Committee explained that the Prison Re-settlement Programme is in place to assist with these issues. The prison also offers a pre-release course aimed at those prisoners who are scheduled for release in the near future.

2.5 Intimidation and Assaults

Two prisoners were concerned about intimidation. One alleged that he was being blamed for a sexual assault on another prisoner and was being intimidated as a result. Prison authorities agreed to investigate. The second prisoner complained that he was being intimidated and threatened by another prisoner. Prison authorities were not made aware of the issue until the prisoner raised it with the Visiting Committee but the matter was subsequently investigated.

As in the past, the Visiting Committee informed any prisoner complaining of being assaulted that they should report the matter to the Gardaí as soon as possible.

2.6 Heating

We had one complaint about the heating on D2. This was reviewed.

2.7 Response to Complaints

There was a concern on the part of one prisoner that there was a lack of information in responses to complaints made to the authorities. Following investigation, the committee was satisfied that the prison authorities followed prison procedures regarding the processing of complaints. The prisoner was reminded that complaints must be made using the correct complaint forms which are available on each landing.

2.8 Missing Personal items

A prisoner complained about clothing not being returned from the laundry. The prisoner was reminded that all personal items should be tagged with prisoner's details. The Visiting Committee also noted that funds were made available from the "hardship fund" to the particular prisoner to cover the purchase of replacement clothing.

3. SERVICE AND PROGRAMME UPDATES

3.1 National Violence Reduction Unit

The Visiting Committee wishes to congratulate the Midlands Prison Service on the introduction of the National Violence Reduction Unit this year,

This new facility offers and provides improved psychological facilities to selected prisoners within the system in an effort to reduce their extremely violent behaviour. Its introduction constitutes a major achievement for the Midlands Prison governors and staff.

Currently, two prisoners from other prisons are accommodated in the Unit.

We look forward to seeing positive outcomes from the introduction of this unit and we believe it will be of enormous help and support to those in the prison population who struggle with violence issues.

3.2 Pre-Release Service

While the total number of prisoners attending the Pre-Release Programme was significantly down on the previous year (72 in 2017 to 45 in 2018), the Visiting Committee commends the ongoing commitment of the Midlands Prison Services to this very important service.

3.3 Social and Community Involvement

The industrial workshops undertook a successful garden furniture refurbishment programme for Cuisse Cancer Care Centre during 2018.

The metal workshop was also involved in the production of bicycle stands for some of the local schools.

4. MEDICAL SERVICES

4.1 Resource

There are 1.5 vacant G.P. posts currently on the Medical Services team. These posts are filled by locum G.P.s.

The Visiting Committee has been advised that current vacancy in the surgery is hoped to be filled by the end of March 2019.

4.2 Mental Health

There was a continuing emphasis on Mental Health programmes throughout the year with invited speakers from various bodies including the H.S.E. as part of the WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) Programme.

The Visiting Committee recommends that the SafeTalk programme should be delivered as part of the mental health offering within the prison.

5. EDUCATION

The Midlands Prison Education Unit is to be commended on its ongoing commitment to the provision of education services and its support for those prisoners who use the services.

The unit provides a range of subjects from basic (QQI level 1) up to and including third level (University).

5.1 Curriculum

A very wide range of subjects was on offer to prisoners in 2018. These included:

English	Personal Development
English (Speakers of Other Languages)	Pottery
Maths	Arts and Crafts
Accounting	Horticulture
Computers	Drama
French	Stain Glass
	Motor Vehicle Technology
Spanish	Metalwork
Communications	Woodwork
Home Economics	Physical Education
Sociology	Education Guidance

5.2 Participation

A total of 1,007 unique students undertook education classes, provided by the Midlands Education Service during 2018. This represents a small decrease (approx 3-4%) over the previous year.

S 3 Accreditation

The following examinations were completed by students at the Midlands Prison Education Unit during the year.

QQI (312 students)

Level I	5 students	
Level 2	32 Students	A further 18 prisoners sat their Leaving Certificate, with 5 prisoners presenting for the Junior Certificate.
Level 3	209 Students	
Level 4	35 Students	4 prisoners studied with the Open University
Level 5	31 Students	2018

5.4 GAISCE Award

GAISCE - the President's Award, is Ireland's National Challenge Award for young people. It is awarded by the President of Ireland to those outside the Defence Forces or An Garda Síochána,

The Visiting Committee was very pleased to see that 11 prisoners received the Gaisce Award in 2018. The recipients, - 3 of whom received the prestigious Gold Award, a further 3 the Silver Award with 5 receiving a Bronze Gaisce Award.

5.5 Other Areas

The Listowel Writers Section competition attracted a number of entries from prisoners in 2018, with some successful prize-winners.

Finally, the prisoners presented a very successful 2018 Christmas Pantomime - Jungle Book.

5.6 New Initiatives

It is always gratifying for the Visiting Committee to hear about new initiatives introduced to the prison by the Education Unit. In 2018, these initiatives included the following:

- Drama Workshops
- Student Appreciation Awards
- Community Links with Laois Downs Syndrome
- Artist in Residence
- Visiting Speakers and Musicians

6. INDUSTRIAL AREA/WORKSHOPS

A number of workshops are in place in the prison, These provide training and employment opportunities to prisoners.

6.1 Certification

8 prisoners completed the Guild of Launderers Certificate programme during 2018.

25 prisoners were involved at various stages of the City and Guilds Building Skills programme throughout the year. 4 of these prisoners successfully passed the Diploma stage

19 prisoners engaged at QQI levels 3 and 4 of the Horticultural certification.

6.2 Industrial Skills

The visiting committee was very pleased to note that the 14-week Light Furniture Restoration workshop has developed into a QQI Level 5 48-week course with 10 prisoners enrolled. We commend Industrial Manager Colton, Chief Officer Work Training Clarke, Mr Kevin Mullally (external Tutor) and the Work Training Officers engaged with this project. We would also like to take this opportunity to wish Industrial Manager Colton every good wish for his retirement.

The Industrial Skills area continues to be very popular with prisoners and the Picture Framing workshop contributed several quality presentation pieces for service medals. Philip Quinn (Stonemason) returned to complete his series of workshops, and willow-making crafts were also introduced and proved popular.

In 2018 also, the Engraving workshop produced a replica of the Ardagh Chalice which was subsequently blessed by Pope Francis on his visit to Ireland in August.

The Horticultural Area continues to thrive and is a creative and very productive area. The ongoing development of the memorial garden is to be praised.

Of particular interest this year, is the introduction of a 2-year research project — a collaboration between the Work and Training Area and the prison Psychology unit. The project considers the restorative qualities of nature, and the physical and mental health improvements to be gained by exposure to the natural environment. The collaboration has attracted the attention of U.C.C. who will now undertake research on the psychological effects the project will have on 12 offenders. The Visiting Committee highly commend the initiative and are very interested in seeing the results of the research in 2 years time,

7. MIDLANDS VISITOR CENTRE

The Midlands Prison Visitor Centre provides a range of information and reception services for prisoners' families and friends.

The number of visits facilitated in The Midlands Prison during 2018 amounted to 26,796. This figure represents an increase of 798 visits (2.98%) over the previous year.

62,680 visitors were accommodated, made up of 51,525 adults and 11,155 children.

The Visiting Committee recognises the importance of family visits to the ongoing welfare and mental health of the prison population, and acknowledges the immense efforts made by the prison authorities and staff to accommodate these large numbers of visitors to the prison. We commend the authorities and staff on their success in this regard.

8. DEATHS IN CUSTODY

3 prisoners died in custody in the Midlands Prison during 2018. The Midlands Visiting Committee would like to express our deepest sympathy to those bereaved.

9. VISITING COMMITTEE INITIATIVES

9.1 Un-announced Visits to Midlands Prison

The Visiting Committee made a number of un-announced visits to the Prison during the year. On each occasion, they inspected different areas of the prison and had nothing untoward to report as a result of these visits.

10. VISITING COMMITTEE VISITS BETWEEN PRISONS

Members of the Midlands Visiting Committee visited Shelton Abbey Open Prison in Co. Wicklow on Thursday 18th October. The visit was extremely interesting and provided a different perspective on prison life.

We would like to thank the Governors and staff of Shelton Abbey for their warm welcome and also for giving us their time to show us around the facility. Sincere thanks are also due to Caroline Allen of the Midlands Prison for her help in planning and organising the visit.

11. OTHER

Members of the Midlands Prison Visiting Committee attended a Visiting Committee Training Day on 23rd April. The training was held in the Brian Stack House Training College in Portlaoise, and all our members found it a most instructive and informative event.

12. CONCLUSION

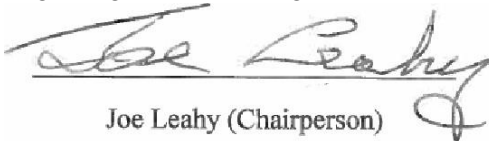
In conclusion, the Visiting Committee was satisfied with the standards witnessed in the provision of care and welfare offered to the prison population during the year.

We wish to express our sincere thanks to all the Prison staff for their support and cooperation during the year.

In particular, we would like to thank Caroline Allen, Governor's Secretary, for her continued invaluable assistance in planning and facilitating our visits and our work.

We acknowledge and thank the Governors and Prison Management team for their support and assistance to us during 2018..

We look forward to working alongside all once again in 2019.



Joe Leahy (Chairperson)