

Annual Report 2017
from
Cloverhill visiting Committee
to the
Minister for Justice Charles Flanagan

Introduction

We are pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Cloverhill Visiting Committee to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Visiting Committee

The Committee remains at three members. We continue to meet each month and, on a rota basis, to make arranged and unannounced visits to the prison. We see prisoners who have requested meetings on both of these visits. During each visit we are a visible presence in Cloverhill. We meet and talk with staff in their working areas and with prisoners on the landings. At all times we make ourselves available to both prisoners and staff. We welcome this informal interaction with prisoners and class officers on the landings and at their work.

At each meeting the Governor will advise us on the current situation in Cloverhill, the number of prisoners being accommodated, and any matters of concern as they arise. We advise the Governor of our visits with prisoners and request appropriate action be taken in each case. We follow up each case and are up-dated by the Governor on the action that has been taken.

We wish to acknowledge and to thank all the prisoners who spoke to us during the year. Their welfare and safety are our prime concern. Each prisoner has his own unique concerns, and we are impressed by how very open and clear they are regarding the reality of their lives, their feelings and their history. Many speak of sadness and trauma in their lives. Many also speak of their loss of family and family contact, especially those prisoners with very young families, of their frustration, waiting for sentencing and with their desire to use their time inside in a positive way. Some prisoners show awareness and regret at the crimes they have committed. Some speak of 'keeping the head down' and finishing their time and how life will be different for them when they are released. There is apprehension and worry regarding their future life, especially if drugs are a feature.

We are impressed by the willingness and readiness of those prisoners we meet to engage with us and with the services provided in the prison and by their desire for self-improvement, mentally and physically. Education in all its forms, the learning and up grading of trades and skills, the lack of workshop facilities and use of the gym are especially important issues that are regularly raised by prisoners during our meetings with them. The availability of these facilities is of vital importance to the successful re-integration of the prisoner into his community and society as is the availability of support services.

There is a high degree of homelessness among the prisoners with perhaps as much as one third of prisoners being affected. This is of huge concern to prisoners and has serious implications for their rehabilitation in society.

We are conscious of the good relationship we have with the Governors, staff and members of the prison service we have encountered during the year. We acknowledge and thank the Governors, Prison Officers and Prison Staff for the courtesy and

consideration they have shown to us at all times. We note the humane and sensitive manner in their dealings with prisoners and their concerns.

From our observation it seems to us that there is a good rapport between prisoners and officers, and we note good name recognition.

We especially thank the Secretary to the Governor for Cloverhill Prison for her commitment in facilitating us at all times, for the high standard of her work and for her good will.

Visits to Prisoners

The Visiting Committee met with twenty-five prisoners during 2017. We also meet informally with prisoners on our walks around the prison. In some instances prisoners have been transferred before the date of meeting with the Visiting Committee and others have declined.

The main issues raised by prisoners related to:

- Health and Healthcare issues – including availability of care
- Delays in access to medical doctor
- Access to medical visits – outside the prison
- Visiting Rights – restrictions on family contact during visits
- Transfers to other prisons
- Access to Gym
- Access to library
- Lack of workshop and learning of skills
- Regime Level Status
- Tuck Shop – issues relating to changes in the cost of tobacco

A number of prisoners complained about changes in the purchase price and the method of accessing tobacco. We visited the tuck shop and spoke with prisoners, the Governor and staff. The issue appears to have resolved itself.

Some prisoners had issues with staff regarding their enhancement status.

Restricted access to facilities including health, library, gym, education and class room facilities, raised by prisoners, the random nature of some of these closures, due in the main to staff shortages, were noted by the Visiting Committee.

The enhanced prisoners we meet at work around the general prison areas that include laundry, gardening, kitchen and general cleaning particularly impress us. There are also instances of generosity, in fundraising and charitable responses from prisoners that form part of their positive attitude to rehabilitation.

We meet with each prisoner in a private room on his landing, in the company of a staff member, unless the prisoner requests otherwise. On the same day we advise the Governor of the issues raised. The general practice is that the Governor will either respond directly with the prisoner, for example on parade, or a staff officer will deal with the issue.

A return visit is made to the prisoner at our next visit, if the issue remains outstanding. We always seek a second meeting with the prisoner where there is a health issue, and especially if the prisoner has complained of headaches or mental health concerns.

There is a further procedure for complaints that prisoners can avail of. Prisoners can make complaints in writing, through a complaints box on each landing. Details of these issues, together with prisoner details are recorded in a Complaints Ledger. The Visiting Committee examines this ledger at each visit. The most serious of these claims, those relating to assault, or verbal abuse are forwarded to the Inspector of Prisons office and the Director General who will appoint an independent inspector. In general, and depending on the nature of the claim, the appropriate staff personnel deal with the majority of these issues. The Visiting Committee investigates further any case or pattern of complaint that we note. A fair proportion of these complaints are withdrawn or not upheld and we would observe the nature of the complaint.

We are satisfied that the representations made by us to the Governor have been attended to and addressed, in a sympathetic and considered manner, and that where possible and practicable, efforts have been made to accommodate his request. We feel that prisoners place value on the fact that their concerns are brought to the attention of a Governor and of the response and acknowledgement of their request.

We again thank the prisoners we spoke to for the openness and trust in sharing their most personal and at times sensitive facts with us. At all times we respect the dignity of the prisoner and the confidentiality of each person.

We thank the staff, the class officers and the staff on the landings, and express our appreciation at their willingness and their co-operation, at all times, in facilitating and making possible our meetings with prisoners.

Notice of the presence and availability of the VC is displayed on each landing of the prison.

Accommodation

Cloverhill Prison has an operational capacity for 431 inmates. It is a closed, medium security prison for adult males and primarily caters for remand prisoners.

During the year the bed occupancy numbers remained below 400.

Prison population The Irish Prison Service Prisoner Population – Cell occupancy – in-Cell Sanitation - October 2017 show that a high number of prisoners share triple cells and therefore have to toilet in the presence of others.

| Prison | Number in custody 10 October 2017 | No of prisoners in single cell | No of prisoners in double cell | No of prisoners in triple cell | No of prisoners in 4+ cells | No in-cell slopping out | Toilet in presence of others | 24 Access to toilet facilities in private |
|------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Cloverhill | 390 | 56 | 94 | 240 | 0 | 0 | 334 | 56 |

Once again the Visiting Committee express our concern, at the high level of these figures, in particular at the lack of toilet privacy for such a high number of prisoners. This issue was raised in our Annual Report 2016 and while we note, that from the October 2017 IPT census figures, the last census figures available, that there are no prisoners sharing 4+ cells and some small decrease in prisoner toilet privacy, the figures remain high. We state again that we consider this an affront to the dignity of the human person and contrary to the aspiration that ‘all prisoners deprived of their liberty shall be treated with respect for their human rights’.

Judge Michael Reilly – Inspector of Prisons, 2015.

During the year there has been an increase in the number of sentenced prisoners the District Court, Cloverhill, has been sending to Cloverhill Prison. At the end of the year there were in excess of 40 sentenced prisoners in the prison. Prisoners are sent from Cloverhill Prison to Cloverhill District Court for hearing and returned to Cloverhill Prison when sentenced. Many returned prisoners ask to go on protection. As other prisons can decline to accept a prisoner on protection, the prisoner remains in Cloverhill, with its limited facilities for sentenced prisoners. We feel that sentenced prisoners should always be committed to the appropriate prison for their welfare and preparation for release back into society.

The constant fluctuation in the number of prisoners in a cause of concern when figures exceed 400 all cells become triple cells.

Deportations

Again we voice our strong view that prisoners committed by the Garda National Immigration Bureau should be going to a secure holding centre and not to a prison. We underline again that this is a prisoners right. Due to the constant turnover a consistent number of committals continue in this area.

Prison Fatalities

Tragically there was a fatality in Cloverhill Prison in November 2017. The Chair of the Visiting Committee met with the Governor. It was a sad time for all. We were assured that the Governor and staff, in particular the nursing staff and the Chaplain, dealt professionally and sympathetically with the family and the process that was involved. The Visiting Committee extends their sympathy to the family of the deceased.

The Coroner's inquest has not yet taken place.

Protection Prisoners

The number of prisoners seeking protection status remains high and looks set to increase. Gang culture continues to be a serious problem within the prison. Taking into account the introduction of the Mandela Rules, two hours of quality out of cell time, we feel that extra staff and improved facilities are critical to ensure that these standards for prisoners are adhered to. Cloverhill holds capacity for 108 protection prisoners. On average, Cloverhill hosts plus or minus ten of this figure.

Security Measures – Drugs

Cloverhill Prison operates screen visits, which are effective in preventing the passing of drugs at visiting time. Dogs are used for searches on Sundays for unscreened family visits and for random division checks. Drugs coming over the wall from boundaries outside the prison confines and over the netting continue to be a huge cause for concern for all. We understand that there has been an increase in drugs from this source. When prisoners retrieve some of these drugs it leads to serious security and operational problems within the prison.

A site outside the prison perimeter has been identified for some time as an area people use to throw contrabands over the walls and netting. Due to resource issues outside the control of the prison the area cannot be patrolled at all times.

The drug situation has been complicated by instances of unknown chemical substances from outside sources. These instances put a severe strain on medical and security staff.

It is the view of the Visiting Committee that whole area of drugs and security measures in Cloverhill remains an area of deep concern and needs urgent intervention by the Irish Prison Service.

Video Links

We regret to note that this remains an underused resource. Remand prisoners are regularly collected from Cloverhill Prison very early in the morning to attend court appearances all over the country. Some of these remand prisoners may be on vital

medication and my not arrive back to the Prison until very late in the evening. This type of operation requires an average of 15 officers per day detailed to assist the Prison Service Escort Core (PSEC), for each operation.

As stated in our Report of 2016, the Visiting Committee believes the continued under use of this facility, which is at the discretion of the Court, is a serious waste of public funding and would hope to see this resource being utilised.

Health Care

Last year we expressed our serious concerns regarding the shortage and understaffing of nurses. We are pleased to note that Cloverhill Prison, at the end of 2017, has 18 nurses in its service, four of whom are job sharing. There is one nursing position, Monday to Friday, which has been vacant some time due to long-term sick leave.

The vacant position of Chief Nurse Officer remains a serious issue. We understand that this position is currently been advertised. The position became vacant following the retirement of the previous Nurse Officer.

The need for an extra nurse for night duty is an issue constantly raised with us. There can be up to 10 prisoners committed per night. Due to the shortage of night staff, many of these committals do not see a nurse until the next morning.

There is one fully trained nurse prescribing medication for prisoners. The nurse is registered with An Bord Altranais.

There has been an increase in medicinal, medical and psychiatric services. The numbers of prisoners using the Methadone Clinic continue to increase. There are currently three addiction clinics held each week.

We have been advised that Psychiatric in-reach services have increased their requests for ECG's and that the full time GP is reluctant to permit these requests to be carried out in Cloverhill surgery, and feels they should be read/ analysed by an ECG technician.

There has also been an increase in the use of psychoactive substances (head shop products or 'spice' as referred to earlier in this report). This has presented prison staff with a significant set of new challenges. A multi-agency approach to tackle this problem has been successful in establishing Standing Operating Procedures, (SOP) in the event of a multiple intoxication situation.

High volumes of prisoners arriving in Cloverhill Prison suffer from addiction and mental health problems, usually both problems. At present there is one Addiction Counsellor in the Prison to service 400 prisoners. These prisoners are most vulnerable and most in need of professional care and counselling. We have met the busy Addiction Counsellor. We would urgently request the service of an additional drug counsellor. The benefits of this would be far reaching in the treatment of addiction and also prevention with the additional benefits of this given the volume of prisoners in custody with drug and other addictions.

We understand that all committal prisoners continue to be seen by the GP the day following committal.

There is an optical care and chiropodist service in Cloverhill Prison.

Because of the increase in numbers availing of the services provided, we believe that the system in place in 2017 will need to be reviewed in the coming year 2018. In our opinion, improvements need to be made in the delivery of the service.

We have visited the medical/surgery area on many occasions and note that in general the surgery area urgently needs improvement and imaginative refurbishment. The area is quite shabby in appearance; there is a lack of privacy in the treatment rooms, lack of equipment storage and a general dated appearance. In our opinion it unfit for purpose.

Psychology Service

We are pleased to report that the Psychology service in Cloverhill Prison has increased its provisions of care during the year 2017 and is now offering a full time service to the community in Cloverhill. There is one full time Basic Grade Psychologist and one part time Assistant Psychologists. The service has been fully availed of, with 20 psychology sessions provided each week.

The service is primarily a mental health service and is focussed on supporting prisoners with a wide range of mental health concerns. These concerns include anxiety, coping and recovery following a psychosis episode, homelessness, deliberate self-harm, suicidal thoughts, childhood experiences of abuse and trauma, personality difficulties and complex grief.

The Psychology Clinic also participated in a number of mental health focussed meetings within the prison. These include a weekly meeting in D2 wing, a suicide awareness meeting and the monthly multi-disciplinary meeting and sentenced prisoner review meetings.

The Triage assessment meeting is an important opportunity to provide care and rehabilitation. Approximately a third of prisoners who attend a triage meeting may not attend a further psychological meeting in Cloverhill as they can be either released or transferred on sentencing to another prison. In such cases the Cloverhill Psychology Clinic will liaise with the Psychology team in this prison.

The Visiting Committee note that the Psychology Clinic is strongly supported by the input of Integrated Sentence Management officers and prison management, in the provision of experienced detail officers to ensure access of appointments in a timely, safe and supportive manner.

Integrated Sentence Management (ISM)

During the year 2017 the ISM oversaw the installation of three interview suites that are fully alarmed and soundproofed. One of the interview suites is equipped with a video link facility. These suites are available twice-daily five days a week for use by other services. The services that avail of these facilities include: Probation, Chaplaincy, Psychology, Psychiatry, Addiction and IASIO. If required other outside agencies can also avail of the service.

One officer is assigned to the suites and to supervise the interviews and consultations. This officer also has to collect and return prisoners to their landings. We have been advised that the assignment of a second officer to this area would be most beneficial.

Cloverhill deals in the main with remand prisoners and in comparison to other prisons has therefore different issues to be addressed. One of the key roles of ISM is the interaction with the various service providers.

Kitchen

We visited the kitchens during the year and were again impressed by the high standards and running efficiency of the service. It remains a very busy area catering for prisoners and their increasingly diverse dietary needs. The kitchen also caters for around 100 meals for prisoners attending the attached Cloverhill Courthouse each day.

Last year we reported that the floor area of the kitchen was in a bad state of repair and would need to be repaired or replaced. We emphasised that this was a matter of urgency. We regret to note that the floor has not been replaced and remains a health and safety risk.

We have eaten the food prepared in the kitchen and are greatly impressed by the high standards of the meals, the diversity of choice and the balance of the menus provided.

On all occasions we have found the kitchens operated to a high standard. Again we inspected the different areas that included the cookers, worktops and storage areas and found them to be of high standard of hygiene. We do note however that some kitchen equipment will need to be replaced fairly soon and would hope to see arrangement for this in the coming year. It is vital that the kitchen maintains its high standard and it will need modern up-to date equipment to do so.

Laundry

We have called into the Laundry premises several times during the year, on random visits. There is a very good working environment and good relations evident between the Manager and the enhanced prisoners. We note that the Laundry operates from Monday to Friday and we have been advised that in this limited time is unable to reach the required level of service for Cloverhill Prison.

Library

The library remains an important and significant part of the Prison Education Service. The service is provided on an agency basis to the Irish Prison Service by professional librarians employed, by the local library authority – Dublin City Public Libraries (Dublin City Council). Designated Library Officers and prisoner library assistants operate the library on a daily basis with support from the professional library staff.

The opening of a second library space in the C wing in the last quarter of 2017 is a very positive development for the library in Cloverhill. A prisoner library assistant, in training with the Senior Librarian, staffs the library. We understand, from meetings with prisoners, that the library is operating well and retains a strong interest from all sections of prisoners.

In our Annual Report 2016 we highlighted several issues regarding the library service we requested be addressed. We are happy to report that all these issues have been acted on and positive results achieved. We would like to thank the Library Service and all who were involved in this successful and positive development.

On our visits to the library we note the range of material provided by Cloverhill Prison Library, and also that the range of material and services is similar to those provided in other branch libraries.

Gymnasium

The Gym areas are popular and vital areas for use by prisoners, providing exercise and health classes. Lack of access and complaints regarding the standard of equipment regularly feature in prisoner's remarks.

Pastoral Care

During the year we met several times with the Chaplain in Cloverhill Prison. We know the role and the importance of the service offered by the chaplaincy, of all Dominations, for the entire prison population, prisoners, staff and families. Chaplains have access to the whole prison at all times and have a unique role to play, particularly in prisoner care, not only in their daily interaction but also at particular times of stress such as bereavement and pre-release.

The Visiting Committee has seen at first hand the special role of chaplaincy during the tragic loss of life of a prisoner in 2017.

The current chaplaincy quota in Cloverhill Prison is one full-time and two part-time chaplains. This falls short of the three full-time chaplain posts, which Cloverhill Prison had up until 2011. We believe that allocating one more full-time chaplain to Cloverhill would have a positive impact on the access of prisoners and staff to chaplains.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the year we set out an agenda of the issues we wished to address and monitor. In the conclusion of the Annual Report 2016, we outlined seven recommendations. Some of these have been successfully addressed. We are happy that the nursing situation has been addressed, that access to library services is greatly improved and note the general improvements in Cloverhill Prison. We set an objective for ourselves to meet both professional and non-professional prison service staff and in house staff who work in specific areas of the prison to gain a better understanding of the need to consider both security and prison sub-culture issues in the prison context.

We propose to continue with this practice and to further liaise with prison staff, medical staff, voluntary staff and other sections to identify issues that may arise during the year 2018.

Issues that we would like to see addressed in 2018 - include the following recommendations:

- Appointment of Chief Nursing Officer
- Additional Night nursing staff – urgent because of the nature of Cloverhill
- Access to medical care to be improved
- Refurbishment of Surgery
- Increased number of staff in the areas outlined – addiction counselling service
- Drugs situation – access of drugs – as a priority
- Toilet privacy
- Increase in number of Chaplains and the appointment of Head Chaplain
- Access to Education Centre for protected prisoners
- Number of prisoners on restricted regimes – their limited access to education and skills to enable them to in reintegrate more easily.

The Visiting Committee would also like to thank the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Irish Prison Service. We look forward to working with them in a continued professional manner in 2018. However we express our serious concern at the dwindling numbers of the Visiting Committee in Cloverhill. The Committee currently stand at three and two present members finish their term of office in early May.

During the year the Chairperson attended quarterly held meetings of the National Chairpersons Group held in the Brian Stack Training Centre Portlaoise. Michael Donnellan, Director General Irish Prison Service, attended some of these meetings.

The Chairperson also attended a conference in February 2017 – ‘Abolishing Solitary Confinement in Ireland’ – organised by the Irish Penal Reform Trust and supported by the Human Rights and Equality Grant Scheme 2016. Staff members of Cloverhill Prison were present on the day.