

Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2017 Limerick Prison

Limerick Prison is a closed, medium security prison and is a remand and committal Prison for male prisoners from counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary and for female prisoners from the Munster counties.

The capacity of the prison is males 210 and females 24. The inspector of prisons' bed capacity is stated as 185 males and 24 females. The number of prisoners, both male and female, detained in Limerick Prison during 2017 consistently exceeded capacity.

The following areas were identified as problematic for prisoners and are categorised as follows:

1. Search process and Dog indications prior to visits,
2. Medical treatment,
3. Overcrowding and sleeping on the floor,
4. Continued slopping out on A wing,
5. Closure of workshops on a continuous basis,
6. Restricted regimes on D wing,
7. Lack of a functioning committal area,
8. Remand and sentenced prisoners mixed together.

Probation Service

We are happy to note that the Probation Officers have continued their educational input to offenders by expanding the lifers group, Alternative to violence programme, sentence work with individual prisoners and in group sessions.

Infrastructure and Forward Planning

The Committee welcomes the ongoing works throughout the Prison.

We note that the 5 to 7 year capital plan for Limerick Prison is proceeding within the agreed time scale. The provision of the new female prison continues to be a priority and the committee is pleased to note that this project is on target for commencement during 2018.

The committee again recommends that work on all identified infrastructural improvements continue as a matter of priority and urgency. The Isolation Unit is a particular cause of concern.

Catering

Throughout the year the Committee has visited the catering department and has found it to be of the highest standard for cleanliness and hygiene. All food items were sampled at points of production and service to prisoners and were found to be of the highest quality both in presentation and make - up. The high standard of training provided to detainees in the preparation and delivery of food as well as the attention to hygiene in the kitchen area affords prisoners a real opportunity for employment on release.

Foreign Nationals

The Committee has again noted the marked increase in foreign nationals in custody. **We have to commend all the staff and services within the prison for the empathy they have shown to these non-nationals.** We also note that translators are provided by the Governor in order to aid the communication process with these male and female persons.

Education Service

The Education Unit currently offers a number of programmes which underpin Positive Sentence Management as espoused by this Committee.

These programmes facilitate inmates to: -

1. Cope with their sentence,
2. Achieve personal development goals,
3. Reintegration into society post release,
4. The establishment of an appetite and an appreciation of the Life Long Learning concept .

Current analysis shows a participation rate between 50 to 75% depending on courses / subjects offered. The Committee also notes that students within the Education Unit continue to offer their work to charitable causes within Limerick City and the surrounding areas. Charitable contributions include: -

- Items of furniture
- Craft and Art work,
- Fabric shop projects.

Benefactors include CARI, Adapt House, Milford Hospice, St Gabriel's School and Centre, The Alzheimer's Society, Crumlin Children's Hospital and Bedford Row Family Projects.

Substance Abuse

The Committee are still extremely concerned as to the availability of drugs within the prison. It is grossly unfair to prisoners committed who are drug free that because of the availability of drugs within the prison that they face a high risk of, and indeed a strong possibility they may leave the prison addicted. We would call on the Minister for Justice to explore the possibility of locating full time sniffer dogs at the point of entry to the prison within the prison in order to further enhance the tools available to the Governor and his staff in stemming this insatiable appetite for drugs. We feel that the drugs problem within prisons undermines the Irish Prison Services mission to ***"provide safe, secure and humane custody for people who are sent to prison"***.

We commend the Governor and his staff on the continued work of stemming the drug flow into the prison. We also note the increase in electronic monitoring throughout the prison and would back this initiative as a Committee. We would recommend that further steps to combatting the illegal use of drugs be introduced into Limerick Prison:

1. The use of ultra sound as used in the USA,
2. We would also recommend the speedy introduction of the new search facilities within Limerick Prison.

Psychiatric Service

We have noted the appointment of the Forensic Psychiatric team to Limerick Prison. This service is overseen by the committed Surgery Staff within the prison and is vitally important due to the increase in prisoners with psychiatric illnesses entering Limerick Prison from the community. **We would however hope that imprisonment is not being used as a containment area for such ill persons who could be better treated in the community setting.** We suggest that there be an outreach centre in the community to enable a continuation of treatment for inmates with mental health issues post release.

Employment

The Committee has noted the appointment of a Chief Officer Work and Training to Limerick Prison. We note that a number of workshops have opened within the Prison. We as a Committee feel that there should be full employment available to all offenders in Limerick Prison. Employment for all offenders would go a long way to the Irish Prison Services commitment ***"to managing custodial sentences in a way which encourages and supports prisoners"***.

We are happy to support the prisons current ongoing initiative which ensures offenders released from Limerick Prison have accommodation on release. The Committee has also noted the large number of offenders who have received direct financial support from the Governor throughout the past year.

Psychology Service

We note the continuing comprehensive service provided by the full time Psychologist within Limerick Prison.

Female Prison

The Committee has attended the female prison on a regular basis. We have noted that the maximum bed capacity of 24 has been exceeded excessively on all our visits to the female wing. We have also noted that offenders are continuing to be transferred from the Dochas centre to Limerick Prison without explanation to the offenders. This has caused

much stress and anxiety to these prisoners and their families who often reside in the Dublin area.

Offenders have also been transferred into Limerick Prison when the wing is already operating at 50% over capacity. We continue to recommend that the capacity of the female wing be maintained at 24 in order to ensure less pressure on offenders and staff in this confined area. We also recommend that work training and educational services be expanded to the female prison in order to abide by the integrated sentence management ethos of this committee. We welcome the new initiatives that have been introduced into the female wing such as the "Women's Voice" group and the information sessions provided by Bedford Row Limerick and Clare. We must also commend the Women's parenting group which has done tremendous work in preparing females for release back to their families and to the communities.

The committee welcome the commitment to a Step Down Unit for Women (Dublin) in accordance with the joint Probation Service / Irish Prison Service Women's Strategy 2014-2016 - An Effective Response to Women Who Offend - a commitment was given to *"explore the development of an open centre/open conditions for women assessed as low risk of re-offending"*.

The Women's Strategy sets out how the IPS and the Probation Service (PS) can work together to provide women-focused interventions to help reduce offending, improve opportunities for reintegration and to improve outcomes more generally. This commitment was acknowledged in the Report on the Strategic Review of Penal Policy which also recommended that *'a greater focus on step down facilities, supported accommodation, and the use of more community based open conditions for female offenders and the provision of an open centre for women'*.

A joint PS/IPS working group considered the issue of an open centre for women, but concluded that a more practical and cost effective way to address the needs identified was to pursue a step down facility for women.

The step down facility (or facilities) in the Dublin area will cater for drug free women who, in general, will have been convicted of one-off offences and who have been assessed as low risk of re-offending. The purpose of the unit will be to assist offenders in their transition from custody to community, or as a progression route from other

women-centred residential facilities. The IPS envisages that the facility will accommodate women for a period of time following custody, or on probation supervision in the community. These women will have been assessed as suitable to reside in the community, and have accommodation and other needs requiring support for re-integration.

It is anticipated that work will begin on this facility during 2018.

However Limerick Prison Visiting Committee believe that it should be an objective to ensure that all females detained in Limerick Prison have the same opportunity as male prisoners to serve out their sentence in the region in an open prison environment. Further that on release support services are provided which will assist with their integration back into society.

Visitation

The Committee visited Loughan House during the year which proved extremely informative in terms of regime activities in another institution. The committee met with a number of prisoners who had transferred to and are now detained at Loughan House. All expressed satisfaction with the regime including the training and educational opportunities afforded to them.

Appointments

There has been a number of changes at Senior Management level within the prison. Two new Assistant Governors – Theresa Beirne and Tom Kennedy. We look forward to working with them in the future and wish previous Governors the best of luck in their future endeavours in other prisons.

We have noticed the increased attention to CPD (continuous professional development) for all officers and very much welcome this development and the continued attention to ensuring best practise regime within Limerick Prison.

In conclusion we wish to express our thanks to:

- The Governor,
- The Assistant Governors,
- All Prison Staff.

We would also like to thank all those who gave advice and assistance to the Committee throughout the year, which enabled us to fulfil our duties. This help, co-operation and assistance is very much appreciated by all members of the Visiting Committee of Limerick Prison.

Patricia McCarthy

Chairperson

Limerick Prison Visiting Committee