

Mr Charles Flanagan,
Minister for Justice & Equality
94 St Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

Portlaoise Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2017

We, the members of the Visiting Committee at Portlaoise Prison are pleased to present our Annual Report for the year ending 31st December, 2017.

The Committee met once a month throughout the year and two members of the Committee visited the Prison once a month. During the visits the Committee visited different areas of the Prison and inspected all services and facilities which are available to the Prisoners.

The Committee met many prisoners who are housed in both C Block and A Block and on each occasion discussed their issues and concerns with the management of the Prison and were satisfied with decisions that were taken and that their recommendations were discussed and actioned.

The Committee wish to report that the E Block which houses the subversive prisoners is in a very poor state of repair with many areas needing urgent attention. The Committee welcome the decision that this Block is going to be refurbished and work will commence in the coming year.

The A Block is a relatively modern building with in cell sanitation. However, there is no natural air flow in the building and this provides a challenge for both the prisoners that are housed in this block and the staff working in this area particularly during the summer months.

The Committee note the lack of appropriate services, work training and education facilities that are available to prisoners housed in this Block and feel that more should be done to assist these prisoners prior to their eventual release back into society.

C Block is a modern building with in cell sanitation. There are a range of workshops and education classes for prisoners housed in the block.

The Work Training area consists of Waste Management, Industrial Cleaning, Laundry, Kitchen, Training Kitchen, Horticulture, Printing Workshop, Picture Framing Workshop, Gym and Painting and Light Maintenance Workshop. The average daily attendance is approximately 103 prisoners.

There are 30 prisoners employed in the catering area where they prepare, cook and serve the daily meals. These prisoners receive training on catering regulations and guidelines. They also receive certification from City & Guilds on different levels of catering. In October of this year the Kitchen provided a large selection of sandwiches for the local Simon Community sleep out.

The fabric workshop made holdall bags that are used in the Reception areas of the Prisons. A holdall bag was given to each prisoner for their personal belongings upon their release from Prison. This year this workshop also made small Easter bags with a chocolate egg inside for each pupil in the local St Francis School. They also made a large selection of Santa hats and socks for the pupils of this school, the Kolbe Centre and for the Visitors Centre at the Prison. There are 12 prisoners in this workshop and all received a certificate in Basic Sewing.

This year also saw the establishment of a picture framing workshop. This workshop has 8 prisoners attending and has been very successful. The prisoners learn the skill of making different types of frames and many were donated to local charity auctions during the year.

The Horticulture workshop has also been very successful and during the year prisoners were certified in various City & Guild courses and Safe Pass Courses. This workshop also provided summer bedding plants to the Portlaoise Tidy Towns committee.

The Education Centre offers prisoners a wide range of subjects at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. The Education Centre holds examinations accredited by a large number of bodies. Open University Distance Learning and Royal Irish Academy of Music are two very popular choices. Visiting speakers from a large number of agencies also attended at the Prison during the year. There was also a large number of extra educational projects and activities which are developed and encouraged by the teaching staff throughout the year. Poetry and Creative Writing, First Aid and Music and Song Writing are popular.

The Committee are happy to report that prisoners have access to a very good health care system and excellent care is provided by a dedicated medical team which includes a GP, Nurse Officers and Psychologists and also there are psychiatrists, dentist, chiropodist and optician attending as required.

The spiritual needs of the prisoners are cared for by the Chaplain and other visiting clergy.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Governor of the Prison and the management team and the staff for the courtesy, assistance and hospitality provided to us on our visits to the Prison at all times during the year.

Anne Turley (Chairperson)

Michael Hough

Declan Brennan

Martin Moroney