

## **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE OF MOUNTJOY TRAINING UNIT 2008**

Twelve monthly meetings were held here in that period. It was very satisfying and gratifying to note that there was 100% attendance by members.

Through 2008, the offender population remained high with a daily average of 90. A total of 196 offenders from various institutions were transferred here. While this number is relatively small compared to other institutions, it shows a significant number here are serving long sentences, occupying rooms for years, with the consequence that not many of the remaining offender population obtain a chance to benefit from the training facilities here. It is worth noting that some of such places are occupied by offenders serving life sentences who have failed to keep conditions of temporary release and are brought back into custody for years, as a result. Many of these offenders have completed all the training facilities that are on offer, with still years yet to serve. The committee would recommend that all long serving offenders coming here would do so with an agreed plan of sentence management, with the intention that the coupling of training and a temporary release programme to do some outside agency work would coincide with release date, based of course on good behaviour here and the keeping of all the conditions of temporary release.

In January of this year, retired Judge Michael Reilly, was appointed the new inspector of prisons. He visited the training unit on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> January. The visiting committee extended an invitation to him, to come and address the committee.

In February of this year, we had a meeting with the newly appointed psychologist, Ms Claire Mahon, and agreed that we would meet on a more regular basis.

Assistant Governor, Ms Aileen Grealy, retired in February. We were all sorry to see her go. She always showed a great willingness to help us, with any difficulties which might arise and she will be sorely missed by all the committee.

We had a launch of a CD which had the offenders signing songs, some of which they had written themselves. A word of thanks to our music teacher, Mr Gerry Hendrix, for the excellent work he put into organising the CD. The cost was €10 per CD, and all the money was donated to Barrettstown.

Gary Kelly, ex international footballer, visited the unit, on 19<sup>th</sup> February, to have a question and answer session with the offenders. This was organised by Mr Christopher Faulkner.

The full compliment of the committee, attended an information session at 2pm, on Mon 07<sup>th</sup> April, in Croke Park, regarding the Thornton Hall project. It was chaired by Mr

Brian Purcell. The committee found the attitude of Mr Purcell, unacceptable and were very concerned that there was no separate training unit.

On May 07<sup>th</sup>, we had a very informative and delightful visit to Shelton Abbey. All members of the staff were very polite and very generous of their time. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, we had a conferring ceremony of the Open University, under the auspices of the City of Dublin VEC, Education Service to Prisons. It was a very enjoyable event.

In June, the Library club bought DVD/ TV combi, for the Library. There were educational videos and other learning materials purchased at a cost of €2,000.00. The funds were greatly depleted.

In the unit, there are 96 single rooms, yet there were 11 rooms fitted with bunk beds. While we appreciate the difficulties that the Prison Service is currently experiencing, we feel the ethos of the training unit is being undermined. The visiting committee is very concerned with this measure.

Mr Jean Carey, was appointed Assistant Governor. She replaces, Ms Aileen Grealy. In July, Mr William Conlon was appointed as a new Assistant Governor who replaced Mr Mahon, who retired.

We learned in October of the death of two life prisoners who were on parole.

Mr John O'Brien retired at the end of October. He was a gentleman in all aspects concerning the visiting committee. His help, encouragement and understanding was invaluable to us all. We wish him well in his retirement. His replacement is Mr Declan Murphy.

The term of office of five members of the committee, also finished. They were, Mrs Geraldine Foster, Mrs Deirdre Kenneally, Mrs Kathleen Diamond, Mr Noel Coade and Mr Donald Doran. They were all reappointed and returned in time for the December meeting.

As regards the offenders who were transferred during the year, a breakdown follows:

- 57 were transferred for having tested positive for drugs.
- 29 for operational reasons
- 31 for their own request.
- 2 for fighting.
- 2 for the possession of mobile phones.
- 12 for failing to give a sample of urine.

In conclusion the committee would like to express their gratitude to the Governor and staff. In particular to the clerk of the committee, Mr Dougie Bolger and all those who in so many ways, assisted in the management of the entire institution.

Mrs Geraldine Foster

Mrs Kathleen Diamond

Mrs Deirdre Kenneally

Mr Richard Brennan

Mr Noel Coade

Mr Christopher Faulkner

Mr Charles O'Malley

Mr Tom Twomey

Mr Donal Doran

Mr Thomas Heraghty