

Arbour Hill Visiting Committee Annual Report For Year Ending December 2008.



The Minister For Justice, Equality & Law Reform,
72/76 St Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

A Chara,

The Visiting Committee to Arbour Hill Prison have pleasure in submitting herein our Annual Report for year ending December 2008.

The Visiting Committee.

The Committee consisted of eight members up to June 2008, three additional members were appointed in June, however the term of office of six members expired in Sept/Oct so the Committee was reduced to five members but has now being bolstered to nine by the re- appointment of four of the outgoing members.

The Committee met every month and at least two members of the Committee made unannounced visits to the prison in the interim. The Committee continuously visited every area of the prison, availed of every opportunity to speak with prisoners and always made themselves corporately and individually available to meet and hear the concerns of any and every prisoner.

A Visiting Committee by its nature and remit, if proactive, can be an extremely important and beneficial piece in the jigsaw that is the Prison Service and this year Mr B Purcell Director General and Mr W Connolly Operations Director of the Irish Prison Service met with us, at their request and a full and frank discussion took place. We explored various ways as to how we could be of assistance to each other, especially now as the prison system advances in regime and structure concepts. It was felt that a training scheme of perhaps a day per year "workshop" for all V.C. members would be very beneficial. We wish to express our sincerest thanks to Messrs Purcell and Connolly. The meeting was definitely worthwhile and productive and encouraged us to go forward proactively with fervour and commitment.

Arbour Hill Prison is extremely well run, it is kept spotless and in pristine condition. There is a very humane and caring ethos in this facility and Governor Dowling, Assistant Governor Healy and all prison staff deserve great credit for their professional yet caring approach to the inmates. The staff/prisoner relationship here is superb and is responsible for maintaining the unique atmosphere and humanity of this facility. The emphasis is on rehabilitation and every prisoner is assigned a job of work or engaged in further education. The

prisoners themselves have on numerous occasions during our visits as a Visiting Committee, praised the management and staff of the prison for the way they run the facility and for the way they support the prisoners. That really speaks for itself, and clearly demonstrates the unique '*Arbour Hill*' approach so evident to all and sundry. We were particularly pleased to note that the Committee's afore stated view was very much reflected in the *Custody In Care Audit* circulated in Autumn this year. The Governor and his staff are to be congratulated on (their first attempt) winning the **SAPPHIRE AWARD for Excellence in Food Hygiene and Food Safety** which is the overall national award. We are hugely impressed with the high levels of commitment and pride that staff and prisoners alike take in the kitchen, hygiene, food storage, food preparation and food presentation areas.

INTEGRATED SENTENCE MANAGEMENT

A new pilot project on Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) has commenced with the initial inclusion of 20 prisoners comprising a mixture of short, medium-term and life prisoners. The ISM is a multidisciplinary approach, which plans the prisoners requirements and interventions from the time of sentencing right through the term of imprisonment and ultimately leading to post release support. The Visiting Committee is unanimously of the view that this programme has the potential to radically reform the entire focus and ambitions of persons in custody. It offers them a structured and supported system to help them towards their rehabilitation and eventual reintroduction back into society. It enables prison staff and all the supporting personnel and services to positively manage custodial periods. We believe that this programme will have an enormous positive impact in reducing the possibilities of recidivism and in allowing former prisoners to reintegrate back into society in a structured and supported programme that will give them every opportunity and incentive to become law abiding citizens. We cannot overemphasise the importance of this initiative for the entire prison system into the future. We recommend the authorities ensure that staff, funding and supports are made available to allow this programme to continue to develop and expand. We sincerely hope that other stake holders such as the Judiciary and Gardaí will willingly and enthusiastically become involved in the roll-out and development of Integrated Sentence management. Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing there is a glaring need for the legislature to address the ongoing management of a small number of high risk recidivist sex offenders. There is a need to broaden the sentence tariffs available to the courts. In a small number of cases fixed tariffs are not appropriate, supervision in the community is not a workable option and consequently there is a need to look at forms of containment on the basis of "level of risk" presented.

Psychiatric Service.

While there is not a resident psychiatrist the prison is serviced weekly by a visiting psychiatrist who is supported by a community psychiatric nurse who visits on a number of days per week. In the current year Arbour Hill did not have any major psychiatric issues and those needs that did arise were very well catered for.

Suicide Watch.

Arbour Hill Prison, we are pleased to note, has had no suicide or suicide attempts in the past year.

Psychology Service.

Dr. Esther Lonergan, the Senior Clinical Psychologist and two other psychologist operate the Sex Offenders Programme and clinical work within the prison. A third part-time psychologist was available during the year and was mainly engaged in very essential 'one-to-one' work with prisoners. They really are very committed and do outstanding work with prisoners. Their contribution plays a huge part in the overall well being of prisoners and leads to a very settled atmosphere in this facility.

The Probation Service.

Arbour Hill has two full time Probation Service posts in addition to one part Senior Officer, dedicated to *committal work, general counselling, sentence planning, family related issues, Lifers Group, Anger Management Group, Alcohol Awareness Group* and in co-operation with the educational services *Group Skills and pre-release work*. Probation Officers also work with the Psychology Service in the delivery of the Sex Offenders Programme.

The Probation Service play a important role in Arbour Hill Prison through individual contact with prisoners and the co-ordination and delivery of group programmes. The Probation service works with prisoners on an individual basis to confront their offending behaviour and to guide them towards greater understanding of their responsibilities to themselves, their families and their communities. The Service endeavours to help prisoners manage their time in custody to enable them fully utilise all the rehabilitative services in the prison so that they can make the personal changes in their lives to ensure that they do no offend again. The Probation Service is also the lead agency in prisoner family liaison and the facilitation of outside agencies such as AA, AVP, NA, GROW, The Samaritans and other specialist counselling services coming into the prison. The Team at Arbour Hill also provide in-depth reports on prisoners for the Parole Board, support the prison authorities in the management of prisoners in custody and assessing the potential risk they may pose to the community.

LIBRARY - The library is opened for at least one period every day throughout the week including weekends and also opens on weekday evenings from 5 PM to 7.30 PM. A wide range of books and other materials are available to users and prisoners working in the library area are also doing the library service courses.

VISITOR'S WAITING ROOM - Limited play facilities for young children have been provided in the visitors waiting area together with tea/coffee making facilities.

INFORMATION TO PRISONERS – A new updated information booklet on prison regimes, rules, entitlements and services is part of the induction 'pack' handed to all prisoners on arrival at Arbour Hill.

GYMNASIUM - The physical well being of prisoners is well catered for with a full compliment of trained staff including a PE Teacher on duty to encourage and maximise the use of the facilities. Mindful of the age-specific groups in this facility special courses are run for the over 50's.

DRUG-FREE FACILITY

Arbour Hill can truly be described as being a drug-free prison. The constant vigilance of staff and the excellent staff/prisoner relationship helps in maintaining the drug-free status. Most of the prisoners here are serving long sentences and this results in staff and prisoners knowing each other well. One benefit is that prisoners who may be experiencing problems are identified at an early stage and dealt with as effectively as possible. Long-term prisoners do not want unnecessary stricter regimes imposed on their daily routines and therefore they don't get involved in drugs misuse. This also means that if new prisoners are involved in any illegal or dubious activity it very quickly comes to the attention of staff and can be dealt with very swiftly. Visits are also very strictly monitored and routine random urine samples are taken.

Requests/Complaints/Applications.

- In the course of the year only two Prisoners (*formally) requested to see the Committee.
- One complained that the doctor was not proscribing the correct medication for his needs.
- The Committee informed him that they were not qualified to comment on the doctor's medical decisions vis a vis medication etc.
- The other prisoner saw the Committee to thank them for their support
- In the course of recent Parole Board Review.
-

**In this context it should be borne in mind that the Committee maintained a high profile on the prison floor and were always available to listen and*

respond to any prisoners concerns: this would obviously impact on prisoners need to formally seek a meeting with the Committee.

Facilities & Services. [Health care.]

- ★ 24 hour Medical Orderly/Nurse cover.
- ★ A G.P. five days a week. (On call at weekends).
- ★ Three resident Psychologists.
- ★ A visiting Psychiatrist.⁺
- ★ A visiting Psychiatric Nurse.
- ★ Dental care provided by Dublin Dental Hospital.
- ★ Visiting Psychotherapist.
- ★ Visiting Chiropodist.
- ★ Optician as required.
- ★ AA.
- ★ NA.
- ★ GROW.
- ★ Samaritans. ***[Including a LISTENER programme - additional "listeners" trained this year].

*** The willing participation of prisoners in this initiative is laudable
And we are all indebted to the "Samaritans" whose efforts and training made this very worthwhile support possible.

Treatment Programmes.

- ☞ Thinking Skills Programme.
 - ☞ Group Skills Programme.
 - ☞ Sex Offenders Programme.
 - ☞ 'Lifers' Programme.
 - ☞ Alternatives To Violence Programme.
 - ☞ Anger Management.
-

Education Activities!

During the year twelve prisoners successfully completed the Junior Certificate, seven successfully completed the Leaving Certificate, two completed Road Transport Examinations and two prisoners successfully achieved Open University Degrees. Forty-seven Life Prisoners also completed the 'Successful Living Course', which will be of benefit in helping them to cope in whatever circumstances they might find themselves in the future. The educational programme plays a very important part in the life of this facility and more than 85% of the prison population partake in some form of educational activity.

Approximately 50 prisoners were awarded certificates from FETAC in a variety of courses, ranging from Ceramics, Spanish, Word Processing and personal development.

Five people were successful in *Listowel Creative Writing Competition* and also in the *VEC's Senior Writing Competition* in poetry and short stories. The enthusiasm and dedication of the teaching staff is to be highly commended.

Workshops, Training and the Industrial Area.

The Industrial Unit continues to be a key constituent in the provision of training and employment. It consists of six separate work areas: print, fabric, woodwork, braille, waste management and catering and provides work/training for almost 100 prisoners. They produce wonderful work for charities such as Barretstown, Durrow Castle and the Irish Para-Olympic Committee. Of equal importance to the output is the transfer of skills that can be so important post release. Additionally it is very important that prisoners are occupied throughout the day as idleness can be soul destroying in its own way. Currently the prisoners in the woodwork are working on restoring a small sailing cruiser, which will be given to a charity when completed. The professionalism and enthusiasm of the staff working in the overall industrial area is something that needs to be seen to be believed. In co-operation with the Head Teacher the Industrial Manager continues to broaden the range of certifiable courses, including FETAC Awards etc.

The Kitchen:

Arbour Hill Prison has a 'Q' Mark Kitchen which is operated to the highest standards. We would like to congratulate the catering staff and prisoners working in the kitchen area for their ongoing dedication to maintaining the highest possible standards. Hygiene and cleanliness are paramount in the preparation and presentation of food. A 28 day rotating menu is used in addition to specific diets for Muslims and some other non-national prisoners. Rice is routinely offered as an alternative to potatoes. Operating standards are such that it's no surprise that Arbour Hill was the national winner of the E.I.Q.A. Sapphire Award for food safety and food hygiene; that is, in addition to maintaining its "Q" mark status.

Certified course during 2008.

<u>Course Title.</u>	<u>Certifying Authority.</u>
B) <u>Primary food Hygiene.</u>	E.H.O.A
[5 inmates have completed this course with five more scheduled for early in the new year].	
C) <u>Elementary cookery.</u>	CERT.
[1 inmate is fully certified].	

Special Observation Room.

The Special Observation Room was used on nineteen occasions, [*eleven different prisoners*] during the current year. On fourteen occasions the placement was at the request of the prisoner. On the other five occasions the placement was out of concern for a prisoner's safety pending medical intervention.

Waste Management.

Major ongoing operation continues, building on the momentous achievements of last year. The prison has an excellent all-weather recycling area in which nine prisoners are engaged full-time together with supervising officers. It has won a number of municipal awards in the past for the management of waste and the prison has made a DVD of the entire process of waste management. The joint participation and enthusiasm of both staff and prisoners is very evident and this facility continues to be run in a most efficient manner.

Chairman's summary.

We are happy to report that, in our view, the prison has been run and managed in a most humane and cost efficient manner with a contented atmosphere prevailing to the benefit of inmates, staff and the public well being.

As far as possible, emphasis is placed on inmate development and rehabilitation, all inmates are engaged in programmes of work and or education – in Arbour Hill there is no aimless walking around yards.

Societies can be judged by their standards of incarceration and on the basis of custodial care as applied in Arbour Hill our country should be proud.

We take this occasion to make this point as all too often the media only refer to failures in the Irish Prison system and the solid good work, delivered daily to the highest professional and caring standard, by management, staff, teachers, probation service, psychology, chaplaincy etc. is ignored. Arbour Hill is not a cold or frightening place rather it is a warm and caring facility that delivers custody with care in keeping with its constitutional and legal obligations.

|||||

Ms Rita Hayes
[Chairman].

Rita Hayes

Ms Angela O'Connor.
[V/Chairman].

Ms Ita Greene.

Ita Green

Ms Eithne Killeen.

Eithne Killeen

Ms Martina Coombes.

Martina Coombes

Ms Wilhelmena Daly.

Wilhelmina Daly

Mr James O'Hanrahan.

James O'Hanrahan

Mr Philip Cantwell.

Philip Cantwell

Mr Cathal Finnucane.

Cathal Finnucane

Mr Charles O'Connor.
