

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

The Visiting Committee to Cloverhill Prison has pleasure in submitting our annual report for 2008 to Mr Dermot Ahern T.D, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Committee.

The Committee continues to meet on the second Thursday of each month. The committee numbers decreased from 12 to 8 during 2008. The meetings were always well attended. Two members of the committee each month on rota basis carried out unannounced visits to the prison to ensure that the prison continues to be run in a safe, humanitarian and efficient way. During the monthly visits we made a point of conducting detailed and comprehensive tours to the different areas of the prison, where we talked to both internal and external staff working in those areas and any prisoners in the vicinity. The Committee have remained conscious of the need to consider both security and prison sub cultural issues in the prison context.

Prisoners before the committee.

During the year we as a committee continued to see large numbers of prisoners. There were 33 individual prisoners who requested to see the Visiting Committee in 2008. Cloverhill Prison largely accommodates remand prisoners and therefore the prison population can be somewhat transient in composition. This has the impact of ensuring a large daily turnover and discharge of the prison population, some of whom may not be recommitted. In order to ensure we see as many prisoners as possible when we visit, we endeavour to make ourselves readily available, so that there is little time delay in actually seeing the prisoners from the date of their actual request. On monthly meeting days any prisoner who wishes to see us was facilitated by two members meeting him before the meeting. In Cloverhill Prison the committee members actually go down to the division the prisoner is in to see him in his environs. There were 12 other prisoners who requested to see the VC during 2008 who were either released, transferred, at court or declined.

The committee continued to monitor the progress of the individual prisoners who had come before them as a result of this one prisoner was seen six times by the committee and two others three times. A number of other prisoners were seen by the committee on several occasions as part of this follow up procedure.

There were various issues raised by respective prisoners who came before us this year, requesting non-screen visits and transfers have continued to be the main issues. For the second year since the introduction of smoking policy the issue of single cells and non smoking cells was raised on a number of occasions. We are satisfied that representations which we have made on behalf of inmates are considered by the Governor and where possible and practical are being addressed by prison management.

Overcrowding

This has remained a continuous cause for concern in 2008. In October the number in custody reached an all time high of 494 prisoners, 28 over the previous year high of 466. This year again we have received complaints from Prisoners that committals

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

have been put in their cell during the night on a mattress, which causes tension and disruptions during the night to all prisoners in the cell. We highlighted in 2007 our opinion that there is an apparent link between overcrowding and tensions in prisons, this is apart from the health and safety concerns for both staff and prisoners. We forcefully reiterate that opinion.

There has been no improvement on the situation with regards to late committals after 8pm at night. This continues to be a serious problem for the management of the Prison, when there are large numbers of prisoners committed at night when staffing levels are reduced. This consequently puts a tremendous burden on the Officers who have to deal with this, which in turn has a knock on effect on the prisoners, this is aside from obvious security implications. We urge the Irish Prison Service to be more proactive in dealing with this potentially dangerous situation in order to be more effective in finding a solution. We suggested last year that given the urgency of this problem which faces prison management the minister direct a reappraisal of this situation, we are not aware if this has been done.

Deportations continue to be housed overnight or for only a few hours. We reiterate our opinion of 2007 that these prisoners should be going to a secure holding centre, not Cloverhill prison. The prison should not have to deal with what are specifically immigration problems. The question has been raised before if prison is the appropriate place for their detention. This whole area needs to be reviewed by the minister.

Hunger strikes

During the year there was one prisoner who went on hunger strike which was resolved by the prison Governor without intervention after meeting with him and his family. The prisoner declined to see the committee. The prisoner was requesting a transfer and when he did not get one went on hunger strike.

Foreign Nationals

Cloverhill continues to accommodate more foreign nationals than any other prison in the country. The committee wish to reiterate its comments made in 2006 and 2007, we call on the minister to review the area of communication which has become an increasing problem. The language barrier creates problems that need to be addressed. The committee have previously identified this as an area where there is room for development of the role of the Prison Officer. It is suggested that one of the ways that this can be addressed is by either specifically recruiting or training up serving prison officers in language skills. Their role would be to act as prison interpreters and they would be used to deal with prisoners on committal and as required when there is a need for an interpreter. We also feel that the possibility of Prison Governor's who are interested in learning language skills should be explored. This would be particularly useful if a prisoner has a complaint. We are delighted to note that during the year Cloverhill received a Polish and Lithuanian officer whose language skills have been of assistance to the Governor.

The average number of foreign nationals in Cloverhill Prison on remand or sentenced on a daily basis continues to be about 25% of the prison population. As mentioned earlier in the report a large percentage of this number are immigration cases. These men speak little or no English. The committee continues to hold the opinion that there

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

are core languages commonly spoken by the prisoners that can be identified and these languages should be the priority languages in which to get either specific staff recruited and or identify if there are serving staff with these language skills or staff that are willing to receive appropriate language training.

New Security measures

During the year new tighter security measures have been introduced under the auspices of the Operational support unit. These measures include the searching and screening of all visitors and staff who enter the prison. All belongings carried on the person are passed through an x- ray machine for checking similar to the ones in use at the airport. There have been a number of seizures which have been reported to the Gardai. The committee strongly welcome the new security measures which have been introduced and hope that they will prove in time to significantly impact on the smuggling into prisons of prohibited articles.

Drugs

The passive drug detection dog continues to be used in conjunction with the new security procedures. We are aware that there have been a number of seizures but it is still too early to say exactly how much of a deterrent this will have on drugs coming into prisons. We the committee recognise screen visits as a proven effective method, together with the netting on the exercise yard, for reducing and stopping drugs being smuggled into prison. Prisoners continue to complain about the fact that screen visits restrict contact with family and friends. However, the smuggling in of drugs continues to remain a problem in prisons. We again strongly recommend exploring the possibility of establishing a Drug Free unit within this prison, possibly doing a feasibility study.

Drug counsellors from Merchants Quay have been introduced since last year but this is still not fully operational. We are only aware of them seeing one prisoner in 2008. We are hopeful they will establish their full service here in 2009 and see a large number of prisoners, who should benefit from this service.

Special Unit

We reiterate our opinion expressed in 2007 that these prisoners should be accommodated in a purpose built facility. The actual opening of this unit resulted in a negative impact on prisoners who were accommodated there on protection as they were moved to a more restrictive regime.

Protection Prisoners

There continues to be a substantial increase in the number of prisoners requesting protection on committal to prison. This can be a significant percentage of the prison population on any given day. This continues to place a massive strain on the prison's resources and can be a logistical nightmare. All of these prisoners have to be segregated and within that segregation there can be further segregation. This leads to a restricted prison regime, including limited access to education.

The alarming growth of protections is a consequential reflection of the gang culture present in society. As we highlighted last year external gang feuds and affiliations do not stop at the gate of the prison when people are committed to prison. This was

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

reinforced to the committee during the year when they met with a prisoner on three occasions who told us there was a price on his head, he feared for his safety and he felt he would not be safe anywhere. He said he could not tell the prison management who he needed to be segregated from and as such wanted to be protected from everybody. When Cloverhill was built it was not envisaged that it would have to provide this level of segregation.

BOSS Chair

The Body Orifice Security System chair is at present being piloted here. The Chair is designed to detect objects secreted internally. So far its introduction has led to a 39% reduction in mobile phone trafficking into the prison. The committee have seen it demonstrated and have spoke to the staff that use it in reception. We feel it will continue to have a huge impact in reducing the amount of phones smuggled into prison and will cut down on prisoners being intimidated to bring in articles as there chances of being caught are increased.

Mobile Phones

Despite the introduction of legislation in 2007. Mobile phones continue to be smuggled into prisons. This is despite diligent detection by Prison staff and investigations by Gardai. We reiterate our comments made in our 2007 report that the sentences being imposed at present are not a deterrent. The committee welcomes the proposed introduction of a mobile blocking system and had hoped it would be in place this year.

Bullying and Racism

We continue to feel that a lot of problems are caused by communication difficulties and will continue to monitor it closely during the year. We have not had any report of bullying or racism made to us during the year.

Video Conferencing

The committee welcome this development which was successfully piloted in Cloverhill from February 2008. At present four Dublin based solicitor's practices, the Law society and the Bar council are participating in the pilot. We urge the expansion of this service to other solicitor's practices, prisons and courts.

Health Care

We regularly met with the health care professionals working in the Prison. Full time nursing care continues to be provided by qualified Nurse Officers and 2 prisons Doctors, along with locums where necessary. We welcome the appointment of a new complex health care Manager with responsibilities for Cloverhill and Wheatfield. A Cloverhill Nurse Manager has also been appointed. The impact on the service provided has been a general increase in nursing activity, healthcare is more focused. There have been more nurse care initiatives. Cloverhill now has Nurse Leaders in diabetes, wound care and Infection control. All Nurses have received training in cardiac first response during the year. A number of Health care services have been established during the year. There is now a Phlebotomy clinic, Vaccinations, Health Promotions and advice for HIV patients. Healthcare also includes Dental care provided by Dublin Dental hospital, a visiting optician and chiropodist as required.

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

It is hoped to further expand the nursing service in the coming year with a STI nurse to work with the STI Clinic established in 2007. Also it is hoped to get an addiction Nurse. There are on average daily around 100 prisoners on methadone treatment, this figure can rise to as high as 110 prisoners. This is approximately 25% of the prison population. The addiction clinics have expanded from three to four clinics a week.

There continues to be an in-reach service provided by the Central Mental Hospital in Cloverhill. Staff from the Central Mental Hospital are normally in the prison five days a week. They provide a valuable court diversion service, along with being on site to deal with mental health issues. This has had a significant impact on the Psychiatric services provided to prisoners. There were no significant incidents of self harm in 2008. We feel that addressing prisoner mental health issues is being positively addressed in Cloverhill. However, we feel that may still be a number of prisoners in custody who should be in the CMH or other secure facilities.

During the year we saw one prisoner a number of times and he complained about the medical treatment he received from the Prison Doctor. On inquiring we found that this prisoner had been seen by the prison doctor more than any other prisoner in custody. We did not feel that this was a legitimate complaint, however we are not medically qualified. We subsequently were informed that the prisoner had reported the Doctor to the medical council, who we have now been informed, declined his complaint.

Library

This is an excellent facility available in the prison and when open is utilized by a large proportion of the prison population. During the year problems caused by staff shortages continued. The Library continues to be one of the first areas closed if there are staff shortages.

In Cloverhill the library is timetabled to open seven days each week for the morning, afternoon and evening periods. Three prison officers are assigned to work in the library for each period. This facilitates more offenders to use the library. All divisions in Cloverhill Prison are allocated time to visit the library. Vulnerable offenders usually visit on the evening reserve period. A new library timetable was devised last year to incorporate the new security landing and Protection landing. In spite of the closures in 2008 there was a small increase of 317 in the number of annual visits by offenders to the library in comparison with the previous year. Figures obtained from the Librarian tell us that the visits by offenders for 2008 are 4,537 compared to 4,220 in 2007. There was also an increase in completed book requests during 2008 this increased from 91 to 209. Number of times the library sessions were closed in 2007 was 328 in 2008 this rose to 385 an increase of 57 sessions. Given 3 sessions a day this is a closure of 19 days more than in 2008.

The stock in the library was increased by 564 books during the year, 20% of the total for new books provided by the Dublin Prison Library Service, which also provides the service for 7 other prisons. Foreign language books in Polish, Chinese, Russian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Spanish and Czechoslovakian are included in that figure. This reflects the diversity of the prison population. Book and magazine donations were also received during the year from the consular section of the Polish embassy. The librarian has informed us that 36 different nationalities used the library during 2008.

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Books in their own languages can help break the feeling of boredom for foreign nationals and obviously helps relax their minds. Many prisoners use the library to read daily papers, listen to music, use computers and access the law collection.

The committee have received complaints during the year about the closures of the library, we consider the library a very important area in the prison. It is now time to address the problems causing library closures for the benefit of prisoners, service provider and prison staff. There is a vacancy for a librarian for the last five years; we urge that this be filled. This may not be possible in the current economic downturn.

Education

Education has a significant impact on the daily routine of Prisoners and is an important safety lever in alleviating boredom. The Educational unit opened in September 2006.

Classes are held in Art, Chess, Craft, ECDL and ESOL. Fetac courses in Computer Literacy, Computer Applications, Communications, English, Maths, History, Philosophy, Persona, information technology and Interpersonal Skills, Health and Fitness. Also music classes in Music Theory, Guitar and Keyboard. Students have taken and are pursuing Mous computer exams, Junior certificate, Leaving certificate subjects and Fetac levels 3 & 4. Classes are also held in improvers English, Literacy and numeracy. A few prisoners are enrolled in Open University courses in Social Studies, Mathematics, Spanish and Business Studies. During the year the committee were very happy to attend the two award presentation ceremonies.

All the feedback from prisoners, the committee has spoken to who are attending the school is positive. Huge improvements have been made in the school in the last twelve months. Numbers of prisoners using the school are continually increasing. However, because of segregation some prisoners do not have the same access to the school. We strongly suggest that all avenues be explored to find a system that gives all prisoners access to the school and that allows students who wish to study full time to be able to do so.

Previous committees have placed education as a primary priority, this committee wishes to reiterate that sentiment. It is of paramount importance to the committee that prisoners can maximise their educational opportunities. It is therefore crucial that now it is open that it should be kept open at all times. Further to this given that some prisoners are in prison for a short time, the feasibility of a one to one ethos of education should be explored where deemed appropriate by the head teacher. This would ensure that schooling in the prison can have maximum impact and benefit to prisoners.

Gymnasium

The Gymnasiums in the prison continues to be well run and are well equipped. It provides quality Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and much needed physical activity. The Gymnasium is available to all prisoners. There are 2 PE Teachers and a number of NECF trained prison officers who work together as a team to provide excellent professional programs and service. They have continued to train a number of inmates up to FETAC standard in fitness.

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Kitchen

The Kitchen caters to and meets the dietary needs of a very diverse prison population. It also caters for the dietary needs of prisoners from other prisons that are held in the courthouse at lunch time.

A 28 day rotating menu is used, including a vegetarian option which has been devised by dieticians. In Cloverhill rice is routinely offered as an alternative to potatoes. Good nutritious food continues to be prepared by the professionally qualified officers, and prisoners who work together as part of a team to achieve the highest standards. The Kitchen provides up to 1500 food covers a day more than comparable to any Hotel Kitchen. The quality of food provided and the hygiene standard is excellent. This has been recognised by the fact that the Kitchen has been awarded the National Quality and Excellence Award Q Mark EIQA, the Emerald award is its highest award and this is Cloverhill's 5th year to achieve this.

At present a number of prisoners are undertaking the elementary cooking training course under the auspices of Fáilte Ireland and Fetac. The committee would like to commend the staff on the standard maintained in the kitchen.

Work and Training Work Shops

We suggested in 2007 that the possibility of setting up a work shop in Cloverhill be explored and work and training opportunities such as short courses such as safe pass, practical cookery, library work shop, craft making, etc, be explored for possibility of delivery. In Cloverhill the only work and training opportunities available for prisoners are the Kitchen and Laundry.

Visits to Mountjoy and St. Patrick's Institution

During the year the committee visited Mountjoy Prison and St. Patrick's Institution. The Committee were impressed with the workshop and work and training facilities available in these two prisons. The value of such fact finding visits are very important in highlighting what is missing from this prison in terms of facilities for prisoners.

In St. Patrick's Institution we saw a home economics class room which was run by a prison officer in which prisoners were taught practical cooking, i.e. preparing meals on a budget, how to cook dinner etc. The committee were impressed with the classroom facilities in the new school unit in St. Patrick's which caters for 16- 18 year olds. Also the drug free unit, which may be suitable to be adapted as a prototype for one here.

In Mountjoy we also visited the drug free unit. The committee were impressed with the dedication and knowledge of the staff working in this area. We were very impressed with the range of workshops in Mountjoy. We would like to take this opportunity to thank both Prison's Governor and Staff for their courtesy which they displayed to us.

CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Inspector of Prisons

The new inspector of Prisons Judge Michael Reilly visited the prison on a few occasions in 2008. The committee did not meet him but will meet him in 2009.

Visit of the Independent Monitoring Board of Magherry Prison Northern Ireland.

In October Four members of the Independent Monitoring Board of Magherry Prison visited Cloverhill Prison. They had specific areas of interests such as the Kitchen, Tuck Shop, Visits and safe cells. After a comprehensive prison tour the visiting committee and Governor had a very informative exchange meeting in which differences between prison regimes in the two jurisdictions were discussed and highlighted.

The committee feel that this meeting was very informative and invaluable. We suggest that the minister looks at the establishing a cross border group to include VC members with a few to exploring common links between the two prison regimes.

Meeting with the Director General of the Irish Prison service Mr Brian Purcell.

The committee met with Mr Purcell in February and had a frank information meeting. They found that he had a very proactive outlook and wanted to work with the VC. He promised to provide a new members handbook.

Pastoral Care

The Chaplain of Cloverhill prison is Fr. John O'Sullivan. Continuing to help the chaplain in providing Pastoral care are Sister Carmel, Sister Margaret and Sister Anne who Minister to the needs of the whole Prison, prisoners, prisoners families and Prison Officers. Other denominations are served by respective visiting chaplains and we are grateful for their services to the prison community.

Listeners Scheme

The Listeners scheme which was set up in 2002 by the suicide awareness committee. To date 74 prisoners have completed the listeners training course and 60 have been invited to join the Listeners team. This year 10 completed the course. If prisoners who are Listeners move after training, they may, subject to Prison authority permission and their own wish to, join a Listener scheme in the new prison they transfer to, if there is one. A large number of those who were trained in Cloverhill are Listeners in other prisons and one is part of the steering committee to set up the Listener Scheme in Mountjoy. One former Cloverhill Listener is now a Listener in the UK, following repatriation.

The committee wish to praise the Samaritans, prison staff and the prisoners who take part in this scheme, which we see as being very important in helping other prisoners with difficulties they may have. Due to the nature of this prison it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this service at the previous level and its future may be in danger in 2009.

**CLOVERHILL PRISON VISITING COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2008**

Chairman's Meetings

During the year Mr Coyle the vice chairman took over the duties of Chairman and attended a number of Chairman's meetings around the country in Cork Prison, Castlerea Prison, Portlaoise and St. Patrick's Institution. These meetings are an invaluable resource for the purpose of sharing information and acquiring prison based knowledge. It is also a way of identifying problems that affect all prisons such as overcrowding, Thornton Hall the chairman's have been told will solve this problem. The committee are somewhat sceptical of this.

During the year the chairman's identified that Psychiatric treatment for prisoners is not sufficient in some prisons. Each committee it was suggested should look for annual report of CMH on services provided. Cloverhill committee has requested this and will include it in its 2009 report. Representatives from the chairman's group met Mr Purcell the director General of the Prison service who has promised more co-operation in working together.

Conclusion

The committee has exercised its duties diligently and are committed to exercising them in full in 2009. We continue to enjoy an excellent relationship with the Governor and his staff. We would like to thank Governor Somers, Deputy Governor Maher, and Deputy Governor Smith. We also wish Deputy Governor Gerry Bracken every success in his new location of St. Patrick's Institution, the committee's secretary Ms Maria Connolly, and all the staff for their help and co- operation during the year.

We would also like to thank Mr David Delaney, Mr Gerry O'Dea, Mr Fergus O'Tuama and Mr Tony Williams, members of the committee who finished their terms during 2008 for all their help and contributions to the committee. We would like to thank and acknowledge the contribution of all the different agencies who give their time and services on a daily/ weekly basis to the benefit of the prison service. We commend them for what at times can be a delicate balancing act which they have to perform.

We the committee finally wish to thank you Minister and trust we have been of service during the year and can continue to be of service.

Signed on behalf of the committee

Michael Coyle Chairman

Peggy Downey _____ Fintan Hudson _____

Eddie Martin _____ Christine Ryan _____

John O'Mahony _____ Mary O'Neill _____

Colin Campbell _____

Dated _____