

Cork Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2008

The visiting committee met monthly and visited various areas and departments in the prison. Members met prisoners who requested to see them and two members were available between each meeting to meet prisoners and on occasions visited the prison between scheduled meetings.

Requests to meet visiting committee members concerned:

1. Medication and medical problems.
2. Transfer to other prisons for family and other reasons.
3. Problems with other prisoners. (Bullying and threats of violence)
4. Problems with staff.

Complaints and requests by prisoners were brought to the governor for discussion and action where necessary. The governor informed the committee of the results and actions taken.

Committee members found work shops, recreation areas, kitchen and laundry working well despite the cramped space and over crowding.

Overcrowding

There is a constant and unacceptable overcrowding problem in the prison and this overcrowding is not conducive to active rehabilitation and adherence to training and pre release programmes.

Education, Training and Pre release

A wide range of educational, training and pre release courses are available to prisoners. Many courses are certified by various educational and training bodies. The committee would like to see more prisoners availing of the educational and training programmes available.

Cell Accommodation

Cell accommodation is old and outdated. Televisions and kettles have helped reduce tension in an overcrowded prison. The lack of in cell sanitation and the practice of slopping out are not acceptable. This has also been highlighted as unacceptable by the committee for the prevention of torture.

Drug Free Environment

Drugs in the prison continue to be a problem. The introduction of a new comprehensive screening system for all people entering the prison and the use of a sniffer dog will hopefully lead to a more secure and safe environment for prisoners and staff.

Visits to and from other prison visiting committees

Our committee visited the Midlands prison and viewed facilities there. Cork prison was visited by the visiting committees from Castlerea and Arbour Hill. The chair persons group held its meeting and visited Cork prison on the 1st October 2008.

Mr Brian Purcell, director of the Irish prison service met the committee at its May meeting and outlined plans and recent development in the service and responded to questions from committee members.

Inspector of prisons

The visiting committee of Cork prison wish to acknowledge the contribution of the late Mr Justice Dermot Kinlen to the Irish prison service and look forward to working with Mr Justice James O'Reilly.

Mental health services

The committee wish to express again their concern at the lack of comprehensive mental health services for prisoners. The present arrangements need to be reviewed urgently to ensure prisoners are treated quickly and when they need it.

New prison

The committee welcomes proposals to replace Cork prison with a new facility in North Cork and hope these plans can be brought to fruition quickly as the present facility is outdated and unsuitable.

Visiting Committee members training

The visiting committee recommends that an induction and training programme be introduced for newly appointed members to enable them to carry out their function in an efficient and constructive manner. This recommendation is necessary because of the increasing complexity of prisoner's problems and prison administration.

Thanks

The committee wish to express appreciation to the governor Mr Jim Collins and staff at the prison for their cooperation and courtesy to the committee. The committee wish to thank the voluntary organisations that assist the prisoners and the prison service; Cork Simon Community, St Vincent de Paul, Legion of Mary, Alcoholics Anonymous and other caring and interested groups.

16/12/08

Chairman Robert B. ... Member

Member Jerry Gledy Member

Member Blaney Member

Member Donald Skel Member

Member Timothy O'Sullivan Member

Member John Murphy Member

Member Jimmy Breen Member

Pat Mc Carthy Member