

*Midlands Prison
Visiting Committee*



*Annual Report
2008*

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***Minister Dermot Aherne,
Dept of Justice, Equality
& Law Reform,
St. Stephens Green,
Dublin 2.***

15th December 2008

Dear Minister,

*The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee are pleased to present its
Annual Report for the year 2008.*

Midlands Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2008:

The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee have pleasure in present the following Annual Report for the year 2008.

Drug / Addiction Counselling Services:

This year a Drugs / Addiction Counselling service was introduced in the Midlands.

Drugs Counsellor Seamus Sheedy addressed the Visiting Committee meeting in November and updated members on the pilot Drugs Counselling service in place in the Midlands and provided by The Merchant Quay project.

As a client load there are 3 counsellors seeing 82 prisoners between Midlands & Portlaoise Prisons and currently 32 prisoners on the waiting list . Of the 82 prisoners currently engaging with the service 67 are from the Midlands.

The service operates on a 10 session module. All Prisoners are referred by the Governor, Probation Service, Doctor or Psychiatric Services and individually assessed and advised under the 'Wheel of Change ' policy.

To date the programme has been very successful with 14 placed in residential or day treatment centres and a number linked in with Mountjoy Training Unit programme.

A 'Harm Reduction' programme is offered to addicts that don't want to change, this is an eight week programme and so far 7 prisoners have completed this programme.

For those on the waiting list , preference is given to prisoners that will soon be released and then referrals from the other services within the prison.

Counsellors link in with the surgical unit and psychiatric service in an effort to co-ordinate additional support.

The Courts often advise that particular prisoners receive treatment while in custody but it has been found that most prisoners referred this way refuse treatment.

An alcohol and other addiction counselling programme is also provided for under the scheme.

The Visiting Committee welcomes the introduction of this new service but feel the service needs further resources given that there are currently 32 prisoners on the waiting list to access this service.

Medical & Psychology Services:

Dr. S. Rasool, residential doctor at the Midlands Prison, spoke with the Visiting Committee during the year with an update of medical services, this is the first time that a residential doctor addressed the meeting and the Committee has decided that this should be an annual meeting.

Ms. Cora Bruton resident psychologist is presently covering maternity leave for Ms. Sarah Hume but on Sarah's return will remain on in residence until September, resulting in 2 resident psychologists for a period.

The committee highlighted the need for 2 resident psychologists in the 2007 Annual Report and recommend that the contract be extended due to the high number of sex offenders and life sentenced prisoners in the Midlands.

Probation Service:

The Probation Service engages in Court related matters and are no longer involved with the welfare side of the service.

Probation Officers continue to access linkage programmes for offenders on their release primarily in drug treatment programmes and with accommodation.

The Training Employment Officer Ms B. Tyrell endeavours to place prisoners in employment on their release.

Educational / Work Training Services:

A number of new courses have been introduced in the school this year thus enhancing the educational facilities available.

Attendances in the Educational Area remain high with pupils attending courses from basic literacy, Junior & Leaving Certification, Open University Courses as well as computer, yoga, cookery and arts & crafts courses.

The Committee wishes The New Head Teacher Ms L Tynan well in her new post.

As highlighted in last year's report the Committee would like to see the Work Training Area extended in order to cater for the increasing numbers of prisoners committed to the Midlands Prison.

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the achievements of prisoners in completing Fetec courses, Safe Pass Courses and Manual Handling Courses all of which will enhance their prospects of gaining meaningful employment on their release from prison.

The beautifully maintained flower beds and hanging baskets both inside and outside the prison continue to be a wonderful testament to the work carried out in the horticultural Area.

Positive Sentence Management :

All prisoner applications regarding transfers and temporary releases continue to be considered at the monthly review meeting attended by an Official from Prisons Operations , The Prison Governor and the Heads of Function within the Prison.

Due to the increasing number of Prisoners serving Life Sentences, Sex Offenders and Protection Prisoners the management of prisoners and safe custody of prisoners remains a huge task for the Prison Service.

Prisoners Requests:

The committee saw a total of 22 prisoners throughout the year. Most of the requests were relating to the new searching procedures and the new Passive Search Dog which has reduced the availability of drugs and mobile phones in the prison. There were no other major complaints received.

Prison Visits:

The Visiting Committee had the pleasure of visiting Mountjoy Prison / Dochas Centre this year. We thank the Governor of Mountjoy and his staff for the courtesy and hospitality shown to it.

The Midlands Visiting Committee welcomed the Cork Prison Visiting Committee in September and were proud to show them the services and facilities that can be provided in a new facility as opposed to an old prison.

Developments:

New Security Measures:

This year the new Security Unit was introduced into the Midlands Prison. Airport style scanners and metal detectors are used at the entrance to the prison. All Staff and visitors to the prison are subject to these security measures. No mobile phones are permitted past this search point. The Committee supports these measures in conjunction with the Passive Search Dog as a move towards eradicating contra band from the prison.

Prisoner's Visits by Appointment:

Visits by appointment were introduced for prisoners and their families this year. This measure allowed for the better management of prison resources and reduces the waiting time for families. There is a dedicated phone line which allows families to book visits in advance.

Environmental Waste Management Award:

This year the Midlands Prison achieved the much coveted 14001 standard for the Environmental Management System in place. The Midlands / Portlaoise Complex is the first Irish public sector multi-site to achieve this award. This certification is an International Award certified by Certification Europe Ltd., Great credit to the Prison Management, Staff and Prisoners under the direction of Assistant Governor Mc Cormack and her team on this wonderful achievement.

Phone Blocking System:

The Phone Blocking system continues to be tested in the Midlands with very successful results. Some small areas of the Prison still remain accessible but endeavours continue to be made to eliminate these areas.

Conclusions:

In conclusion the Visiting Committee wish to acknowledge the continuing high standard of cleanliness, hygiene and delivery of services to all Prisoners in the Midlands Prison.

The Committee extends its congratulates to the Governor and his Staff on attaining the coveted 14001 standard of Environmental Management System and in so doing being the first Public Body to achieve such an Award.

The Drug Addiction Service introduced in the Midlands Prison this year is seen by the Committee as a very welcome service in combating drug addiction but has concerns about the waiting list of 32 prisoners to access the service. Additional Councillors should be employed to eliminate the waiting list.

The Midlands Prison is very fortunate to have an in-house medical service and full time doctors and nursing staff to take care of the medical needs of prisoners. Having been addressed by Dr Rasool, the Committee received a good insight into the medical requirements of prisoners in custody.

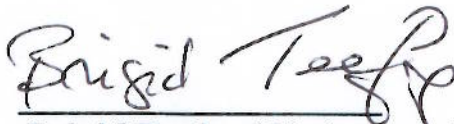
Concern was raised by the Committee regarding the delay in the inquest hearings of the two prisoners who died in custody last year.

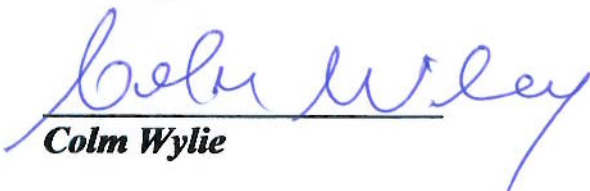
The effectiveness of the new airport style Security Measures, the introduction of the Passive Dog Search and the phone blocking system are very welcome measures in combating the availability of contra band in the prison and the Committee supports these measures.

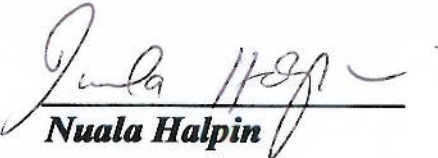
The Committee were delighted to welcomes the Director of Prisons Mr. Brian Purcell to the Midlands Prison, where he addressed both the Portlaoise and Midlands Committees jointly. This was a very productive and informative meeting and the committee hopes this will be an annual meeting.

Good wishes is extended to Governor John O'Sullivan , former Midlands Governor, in his new post and the committee thank him for all his assistance over the past number of years.

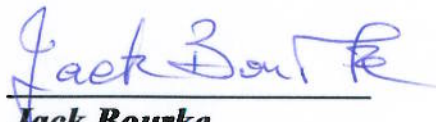
In conclusion the Visiting Committee wishes to acknowledge the continuing high level of commitment and professionalism extended by Governor Edward Whelan and all his staff in their delivery of service at the Midlands Prison,


Brigid Teeff (Chairperson)


Colm Wylie

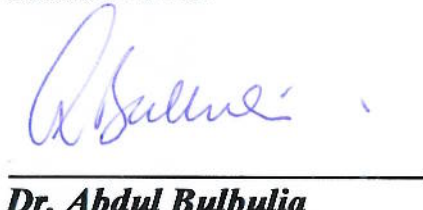

Nuala Halpin


Paddy Boland



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