

**Minister Dermot Ahern
Dept. Of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
94 St Stephens Green
Dublin 2
15 December 2009**

Dear Minister,

**Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to present its
Annual report for the year 2009.**

Introduction

The Visiting Committee in Castlerea meet the first Thursday of each month, these meetings were extremely well attended with two monthly random visits to the prison, which included full and comprehensive tours of the prison. The Committee was joined by the welcome addition of Mr Francis Fitzsimons. The committee would like to thank the committee members who have left during the year and would like to thank them for their time and commitment to the visiting committee in Castlerea.

New Harristown Unit

The new remand unit was a very welcome development in Castlerea prison. It offers the best accommodation for prisoners committed on remand, with in cell toilet facilities with a shower per cell, also separate recreation areas for each wing, of which there are four wings. The new “challenging behaviour units” are a very beneficial asset to Castlerea as now prisoners who are on punishment can be dealt with on site rather than transferring these prisoners to Cork. These new units are made up of the latest equipment including the recording of landings etc. The movement of the exercise yard to the internal section of the prison was also a very welcome development, to stop contraband been thrown over the prison wall. The completion of the all weather pitch within this area is a fine example for other prisons to take note of again it is brilliant to see prisoners playing football in this area and provides a great sense of teamwork for the prisoners. The committee would like to thank all concerned in the planning and building of this fine unit. It is the hope of this committee that with the opening of this new unit and the extra accommodation available in Loughan House that this will be an end to the serious overcrowding we have seen in the past.

New Recreation Unit

This is another fine example of a purpose built unit with a major input from the staff and management in the prison and is broken down into the following headings:

Tuck Shop; A new tuck shop facility with a store room on hand to receive deliveries. The tuck shop yet again provides an excellent service and with the extra numbers now in Castlerea prison the workload of the tuck shop has increased substantially. The committee would like to acknowledge the great work done by the staff in this area.

Gym; Yet again a brilliant facility with some fine pieces of equipment on offer and is always very well attended by prisoners as seen on the prison visits by the committee. There are now shower facilities available in the gym area for prisoners after they have finished their workout. This new spacious, bright, clean and well maintained gym is a credit to the staff involved in the planning and operation of this area.

Sports Hall; This is a enclosed sports area for playing indoor football etc. Yet another brilliant facility to have in the prison complex.

Recreation Area; This area is above the tuck shop and gym area and comprises of a TV room, card room, pool room and phone area. This is a great improvement on the facilities that were on offer previously for both prisoners and staff alike. We believe that in the near future a new phone system will be in operation for the prisoners to be able to contact family and friends and see this as a vital link for prisoners with their families.

Library; This is again a very welcome development within the prison and would like to welcome our new librarian to the new post in Castlerea and wish him the very best of luck in his new posting .The library offers a large array of new novels etc. and can offer legal documents for prisoners.

Incidents:

The committee is aware that when the numbers in a prison increase so do the level of incidents, having said this the committee was shocked to hear of the riotous behaviour of six prisoners that were transferred from the Midlands prison in October 2009. The committee would like to thank the staff for dealing with this incident in such a professional manner. This was the first incident requiring staff in riot gear and shields to contain a situation, it was a credit to the staff that no other prisoners became involved in this matter which could have been more serious. It was fantastic that these prisoners were kept in Castlerea in the CBU for the duration of their punishment. The second incident of major note was on the night of 27th December when a prisoner smashed his cell and an ACO received cuts to his face requiring hospital treatment, the committee would like to wish him a speedy recovery. As in every walk of life there is going to be fights etc. and prison is no exception, all incidents are dealt with very professionally by the staff and prisoners dealt with on report by the Governor. It was with great sadness the committee learnt of the death in custody of one inmate in July, but on this issue we would like to thank the nursing staff and the staff in general who saved numerous lives during 2009.

Prisoners Before The VC:

In addition to the offenders that the committee met in the course of their visits to the prison there were some written requests and several offenders requested to meet the entire committee. All cases were discussed at length and the relevant course of action taken. Yet again this year the small numbers of offenders requesting to see the committee is a very good indication as to how the prison is being run including the extra numbers now in custody in Castlerea prison.

Retirements:

It is with great sadness that we said a very fond farewell to some of the most dedicated staff this committee has seen. It is sad to see staff with thirty years experience leaving Castlerea prison, all we can do is wish them all health and happiness in their retirement. The other side to this is to see the younger staff arrive in Castlerea and again we wish them well in their career here in Castlerea prison.

Laundry:

The laundry area in Castlerea prison is an area that does need a lot of attention. The machines that are in operation here are very old and not up to the demands being placed on them due to the increase in population here. We have expressed this view to the Governor which he informs us that new equipment will be in place in the near future.

Reception:

This is another area that needs to be upgraded for the extra demands being placed on the staff in this area. The number of lockers available to keep prisoners clothing is not sufficient for the number of offenders in custody. A new extension is now in the building stage and the committee looks forward to this completion in the near future. The committee was very impressed with the new “BOSS” chair (body orifice searching system) whereby a prisoner sits on the chair and it indicates if the offender has anything hidden internally.

Chaplaincy:

Again the great work carried out by the lay chaplain continues in Castlerea whereby she co-ordinates mass with the local Parish Priest and with any other needs of other religious denominations. She also does great work in dealing with family bereavements of offenders, and the committee would like to thank her for doing this very difficult task so professionally.

Surgery:

Again the level of care offered to prisoners in Castlerea is second to none, the dental care is provided by a visiting dentist who visits once a week. The committee welcomes the new visiting psychiatrist. The local GP attends Monday to Saturday and at any other time once called to the prison. The committee expressed its concerns regarding the roll out of the methadone programme in Castlerea prison but has since learned that it is prison policy to have methadone in each institution.

Comparative Visit:

The committee was grateful for the comparative visit during the year to Loughan House which was of great benefit to the members of the committee who had never seen Loughan House previously. The new accommodation block which is now available was fantastic to see and the new education wing was a credit to all concerned. We would like to extend our thanks to the Governor and his staff for the courtesy shown to us on the day.

Kitchen:

What can we say about the kitchen area that we have not already said in previous years only that the great work continues here. The increase in numbers has put a lot more pressure on the staff and prisoners working in the kitchen but never once has any prisoner complained to this committee regarding any matter in the kitchen, this goes for both the main block and the grove area. Congratulations to all concerned in getting awarded the “Emerald Award” from EIQA. Delighted to hear that 14 offenders are currently taking part in the City and Guilds catering course.

Waste Management:

This has proved to be the most cost efficient programme that the prison has commenced, this area has been visited by other prisons and local county councils alike. The committee is aware of interest in a waste water recycling treatment but due to the current climate it is not sure if such a programme would be given the go ahead.

Horticulture:

Once again this year it was a pleasure to see the hanging baskets that were given to the town of Castlerea by the prison. This sets a very good example to the town of the good work been done in the prison.

Operational Support Group:

Further to the report from last year the committee was delighted to receive the two sniffer dogs and their handlers full time in Castlerea. The dogs operate at the main gate of the prison and the visitors etc. pass by the dog, if the dog gives a indication the visitors are not permitted to enter the prison.

School:

The school has always been a great asset to Castlerea prison in offering prisoners the chance to educate themselves while in prison. Like last year a lot of the classes are over subscribed but they do get accommodated at a later date.

Director General:

The committee was very pleased that the Director General Mr Brian Purcell took the time to visit Castlerea and have a frank and open discussion with them.

Conclusion:

The committee was delighted with the new developments as outlined above and look forward to the projects underway being completed. Once again this year the members of the committee feel that Castlerea is a very well run prison with very professional and courteous staff. The committee would like to acknowledge the courtesy and help extended to them by the Governor and Staff over the last year.

Visiting Committee Annual Report 2009

Michael Nevin

Mr L Mc Entire

Mr S Kilgannon

Ms M Scanlon

Mr M Leonard

Mr P Greaney

Mr F Fitzsimmons

Mr E Brady

Ms M Darcy

Mr M Daly

Mr S Kelly