

**IRISH PRISONS INSPECTORATE**

***LIMERICK PRISON***

**REVISIT INSPECTION OF LIMERICK PRISON:  
17TH & 18TH FEBRUARY 2004**

# **Role of the Irish Inspector of**

## **Prisons and Places of Detention**

The Office of the Inspector was established by an order signed by the Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform on the 21st February 2002. There is a statutory provision in the forthcoming Prisons Authority Bill for the establishment of a Prisons Inspectorate. The following are the terms of reference for the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

To -

- (a) Inspect and report, as the Inspector considers appropriate, to the Minister on prisons and places of detention under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- (b) Report in particular on conditions in those institutions and on the regimes in place for prisoners and detainees.
- (c) Investigate and report on any specific issue referred to the Inspectorate by the Minister.
- (d) Submit to the Minister an Annual Report on the activities of the Inspectorate.

### **GUIDELINES:**

In carrying out an inspection of any prison or place of detention the Inspector will, in general terms, have regard to such matters as:

- (a) the quality of the regime;
- (b) the attitude of staff and inmates
- (c) health, safety and well-being of prisoners
- (d) the conditions of the buildings
- (e) questions of humanity and propriety;
- (f) any general pattern which may indicate possible inadequacies in the management of the prison

As the terms of reference provide, the Minister may also request the Inspector to investigate and report on specific issues or incidents connected with the running of any prison or place of detention. Furthermore, the Inspector may raise issues of concern, arising out of an investigation or an inspection, either with local management, the Director General of the Prisons or the Minister. To facilitate the Inspector in carrying out his functions, he

may consider complaints from prisoners but only to the extent that such complaints are relevant to the functions of the Inspector. The Inspector will, not later than four months following the end of each calendar year, submit a written report to the Minister on his activities during the year.

It is intended that the annual report will be published. The Inspector will also furnish the Minister with such information relating to his activities as the Minister may require from time to time.

The functions outlined above will also apply to any child detention centres and remand centres designated by the Minister under Section 150 of the Children Act, 2001.

These terms of reference may be further refined in the forthcoming Prisons Bill in the light of the experience gained in the interim. The Inspector will also be entitled to report and make recommendations, in the light of experience gained, on the contents of the legislation which will eventually make statutory provision for the Prisons Inspectorate.

Any enquires or comments about the inspectorate should be directed in the first instance to:

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## **1. Introduction**

The Inspector and his team made a full visitation to Limerick Prison which required a two day visit. The inspection team consisted of the Inspector Mr. Justice Kinlen and Special Advisor James Woods.

The purpose of the revisit was to follow up on points of note and recommendations made arising from the previous full inspection of the prison in November 2002/ March 2003 and to examine any significant changes in the meantime. It was not to inspect the whole regimes, facilities, services or management of the prison and the revisit is not to be taken as a full inspection. The business plans for the prison for the years 2001 to 2003 were also examined to establish if the targets set were achieved or completed.

It is the intention of the Inspector to revisit within a year or two, all prisons and places of detention who have had full inspections carried out and to establish if the findings or recommendations of the full inspection have been activated.

Date:

Mr. Justice Dermot Kinlen  
The Inspector of Prisons and  
Places of Detention

## **2. Background**

Limerick Prison is located at Mulgarave Street and part of it (“A & B” Divisions) is the oldest section of prison in operation in the country, it having been built between 1815 and 1821. The old C & D Divisions have been demolished and replaced with two new wings. The old female prison section has also been vacated and replaced with a refurbished building know as “E” wing.

The prison overall is quite small and cramped due to a lack of space to expand or extend. The new women's prison if constructed as planned on a different site would certainly relieve the pressure of the male prison population. However this particular project is deferred for budgetary reasons. The prison includes a large area which is used as a car park and beyond that another area which joins the junction of Mulgrave Street and Roxboro Road. The Probation and Welfare Services are presently sited in Roxboro House on Roxboro Road. They will be vacating that building and that will hopefully become a hostel or a halfway house for the prisoners on release from Limerick Prison.

The prison holds both sentenced and remand male and female prisoners aged from 17 years upwards. The male prisoners are received from courts within the counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary while the females are committed from court areas throughout the Munster region. Limerick Prison also caters for inter prison transfers.

The entire cellular accommodation is provided with electric power points which facilitates each cell being fitted with electric kettle, t.v and other music or educational equipment that the prisoners may require. In-cell sanitation is provided in the two new wings as well as in the refurbished E wing for the female prisoners. The old A & B wings still have the slopping out practice of chamber pots in their cells.

The prison held subversive prisoners in the past but they no longer hold such category and the security has accordingly being reduced to medium standard. The prison staff are no longer augmented by the gardai and the army personnel.

The Inspector made nine recommendations arising out of his pervious inspection and also highlighted some concerns in his conclusions. The main concerns consisted of:

- (a) the design of the cells in the newly refurbished female section
- (b) the members of the visiting committee and the probation and welfare service had never met
- (c) sentence release management and accommodation for prisoners on release
- (d) facilitates and exercise area for D1 class prisoners
- (e) the serving of food on paper plates
- (f) staff morale

Both the recommendations and the concerns raised in his conclusions are dealt with in detail within this report at section “meeting with the Governor”.

### **3. Meeting with the Governor**

The Inspectorate team met the Governor Mr. Pat Laffan and his senior staff in his office. They made us very welcome and also provided us with the facilities of the boardroom for the duration of our stay.

He stated that he had 212 male and 18 female prisoners in custody on that day. He outlined changes which had taken place since our last inspection with the administration offices being moved from rooms within the old Governor’s house and prefab buildings outside of the D wing to new accommodation in the new “C” block. The old Governor’s house has been demolished.

The new “C” wing which replaced the old one is very impressive. Part of the ground floor contains the administration which is finished to a very high standard. It is of pleasant design and is extraordinarily quiet in view of the fact that there are prisoners since last week on the floor above. There is a large visiting area and prisoners recreational facilities are also on the ground floor. It seems a very well designed and constructed premises. With the closure of other prisons and the pressure of people being sent to prison the Governor anticipates, that shortly, he will have 270 prisoners in all.



The other changes which the Governor outlined consisted of the removal of the prefab office building outside of D wing to another prison as well as the terrapin sheds at the front of the prison being removed. The railings in front of the prison are being removed, redipped and being reinstalled. They are planning a development for the front of the prison rather like the outside of Arbour Hill Prison.

The Governor stated that he intends to have a water feature installed in the area where the prefab office building is now located when it is removed within the next month or so. The local sculptor Mr. Simon Moller is designing same and another of his works is already in place outside the front of the prison.

The gratuity has been increased from €2.00 per day to €2.50 per day and in the opinion of the Governor it should be at least €5.00 per day. Part of it could be banked to provide against the needs of the prisoner on release.

Each cell occupant is now provided with a kettle. This is a great improvement. I queried that they should have their main meal later or leave it at 12.15 -12.30 p.m. The Inspector said that it had been intended on a trial basis in Wheatfield to have the main meal in the evening so that the prisoners would face the night without the pangs of hunger from a long fast. This has not happened, as the Governors felt that there should be uniformity re meal times across the service. However, Governor Laffan pointed out that they get milk, sugar, bread and buns, from the kitchen and they can purchase biscuits and other items from the tuck shop. The Inspector was delighted to hear of

the provision of the kettle and at the same time there was central control so if there was a riot or similar trouble and hot water was being used as a weapon, it could be switched off and the prisoner would be locked up until he and the water had cooled!

The Governor outlined that he was just after receiving financial sanction for the provision of a new wing to the prison which will facilitate the educational needs as well as the medical requirements plus extra space and facilities for the library. It is only at early stages yet and decisions will have to be taken as to the most suitable type of building with the finance available. The Board of Works are now engaged to draw up plans for same.

The Inspector then queried the position regarding confidential communications. He was informed that communications to and from lawyers, to and from the CPT and the Samaritans were not opened. However, some lawyers who sent letters to prisoners sent them via the Governor. The Governor handed them to the appropriate ACO who brought them to the prisoner. The prisoner had to open it in the presence of the ACO to ensure there was nothing other than a letter inside. The letter was not read by any member of staff.

The Inspector was very pleased to be informed that two female prisoners ran a half marathon to raise funds for the Leukaemia Department of the Mercy Hospital in Cork. They raised €700.

Cutbacks was then discussed and the Governor outlined that there was 64 million allocated for overtime last year and the Minister undertook to reduce it. As it turned out apparently the actual sum was 61 million. All prison Governors were told that they had to reduce the figures, so it is now reduced to 31 million for this year. The Governor gave us a detailed breakdown of how he has cut back on expenses. There are now no visits for prisoners on Tuesdays as part of the cutbacks along with a list of other such actions. It is a very impressive document and he certainly seems on target. However, some of the cutbacks may effect services to prisoners which is a worrying aspect.

Prisoners medication prescriptions used to be given to the prisoner on discharge to give to their G.P's but sometimes they altered the document. Now the medication statement (which is very important) is sent direct to the prisoners' GP on discharge. This is obviously a more sensible arrangement. However, some people particularly the homeless may not actually have a GP although they are entitled to one. Prison doctors do not approve of methadone maintenance. There is no such programme in the prison. The governor claims that Limerick has the strongest punishment policy regarding illegal drugs found in the prison. At the same time the Inspector was informed by another source that prisoners in Cork apply for transfer to Limerick on the grounds that drugs are more readily available in Limerick. Certainly there seems to be a concerted effort by management to eradicate illegal drugs as humanly as possible. If any illegal drugs are found on a prisoner the standard punishment consists of: four days lost off remission, privileges are withdrawn for two months and the prisoner placed on screen visits for six months.

The Governor informed us that they are in the process of sharing a full time counsellor with the local Health Board. They are recruiting at present and the costs will be shared between the Irish Prison Service and the Health Board.

The cost to the prison service will be €20,000 per year.

The Inspector thinks this is a start but it is inadequate.

The Inspectorate team then referred to the recommendations contained in the previous inspection report and went through each to ascertain if they had been acted upon.

#### **4. Review of Recommendations**

##### **6.2 Gymnasium.. The addition of two punch bags with appropriate quality gloves for the use on same**

Result: The two punch bags mentioned in our original report have been provided and are well received by the prisoners. The POA say they only arrived last Monday. However, better late than never is the answer to that assertion.

##### **6.3 Library... The expansion of the entire library area**

Result: The expansion of the entire library area was not done. A new education unit has been approved for the prison which will include a large library area. The problem with the education unit and other services within the new proposed building is that it has just been sent to the Board of Works

to draw plans and to arrange for tenders for same. This can take considerable time to complete and the lack of proper library space in the meantime is a problem. The Inspector is glad to note that this matter is progressing and it is hoped, now that the matter has been financially approved, that the other stages will be expedited.

- 8.1 Access to the visitor waiting area outside of the normal visiting times in the new development.. **An arrangement which allows access for visitors who arrive early.**

Result: The Inspector having arrived early himself for the inspection visited the new access for visitors which has not yet been commissioned but is nearly finished. With the anticipated increase in population it seemed practically to be too small. However, it was explained to the Inspector how it was hoped to expedite people through it. It certainly is a great improvement on previous arrangements. They are also arranging that prison officers get off at a staggered time so that there will be an officer to open the doors at 1.30 pm for people coming early to visit at 2.00 pm particularly if the weather is inclement. They will have shelter and comfort within this new area.

- 12.3 Psychiatric Care... **The Inspector recommends that psychiatric care for prisoners should be on par with that provided in the general community**

Result: At the moment there is a visiting psychiatrist who comes from Dublin one day per week. However, he is frequently engaged in writing reports

particularly for the local courts. At present the position in the view of the Governor and indeed of the Inspector is that the present system is insufficient for the needs of the prison. It would be preferable to have a psychiatrist who lived fairly near the prison and who would be on call in emergency. The need is for a minimum of one full day a week to deal with the psychiatric health problems of the prisoners plus at least another half day per week to deal solely with court reports.

13.10(a)The value of the vouchers... **The Irish Prison Service Headquarters should establish a basic standard amount which would be applicable to all prisons on a unified basis.**

Result: The value of the vouchers have not been unified with different rates still applying depending on the particular prison a prisoner is detained.

14.2/3 The providing of one medical area with new waiting room attached... **The Inspector recommends that the Irish Prison Service Headquarters includes this in any future refurbishment plans**

Result: The Inspectors initial report recommended the providing of one medical area with new waiting room. This has not happened. However, in the plans for the new wing accommodation for the medical area will be provided along with the education and library. The matter has gone to design and the Governor is hoping it will be finished in about two years. He states

that this will provide adequate space for the educational facilities and for storage as well as sufficient accommodation for medical and library services.

17.6/7 Teachers having been sent to various buildings and inadequate storage space... **When plans are being drawn up for the refurbishment of the rest of the prison that consideration should be given to having the educational unit placed within one area and that proper storage facilities be provided**

Result: The Inspector notes that there is no genuine effort made to house all the educational facilities in the one area and provide adequate storage at present. The new educational facilities are at planning stage. The question about the proposed new education unit is whether it is to be in separate modular or not. The Governor estimates that it should be fully operational in one and a half/ two years. The Inspector would encourage urgent attention to this problem but hopes that the Governor's estimate is accurate and perhaps it could even be achieved in a lesser period.

18.12 Records show that March 2002 was the last time that staff fire drill training took place... **Staff fire drill training should be updated on a regular basis**

Result: The Inspector is always very concerned about fires and fire escapes. The criticism in the original report was said to be accepted by the Governor. We were provided with the details of the various training that have taken

place since our last visit and this is certainly to be commended. There is a very clear improvement in this area and all parties deserve congratulations.

19. Bullying amongst staff... **The Governor should keep this matter very much under review**

Result: He agreed that he was keeping bullying under review. However, he said that there was very little complaints brought to his attention. If possible, he tries to get both parties to come together to discuss the matter and his mediation has frequently been the best but not the only way to resolve the issue. He has dealt informally with a number of cases since the publication of the report. There is a structure, if needs be, for dealing with the matter under the code of discipline, but he has not dealt with it so far in this manner. The Governor and management are now very aware of this problem and are keeping it under constant review.

**5. *Conclusions of previous Inspection Report***

The Inspector then commenced discussions on the conclusions of his previous inspection which are outlined herewith.

- *Design of cells in newly refurbished women's prison*

The design of the dignity screen surrounding the toilet in the cells is unsatisfactory when more than one prisoner occupies the cell. The Governor had this matter raised with Irish Prison Service Headquarters and the Board of Works but were unable to design any better model despite several meetings on the subject. So they have to remain as they are unless Headquarters



makes a decision to reduce the number to one prisoner per cell which would eliminate the problem

- *Visiting Committee and Probation and Welfare Staff meeting and accommodation for prisoners on release*

The Inspector was glad to note that the visiting committee are now interacting with the Probation and Welfare Service and have had a least two meetings which were productive and helpful. As regards accommodation for prisoners on release, this problem which is found in every prison in the system has been greatly relieved by the establishment of hostels. There is the Clare Street Hostel, and The Wet Hostel (and takes drunks in hence its name!) in St. John's Square which is comparatively new. As already mentioned it is hoped that a hostel will be built on the vacated Probation and Welfare offices. Another area beside the car park is partially occupied by people who claim to have a right. I understand that there is litigation pending about this area. It is hoped that it will all be incorporated into the prison and it could be used for another half way house or for other prison facilities such as training workshops.

- *Food*

The food was of the usual high quality. Paper plates have disappeared and are now replaced with delph plates. The result is that the presentation is much more pleasant and the Inspector is delighted to see that the Governor implemented this suggestion so promptly and so well. The Inspector and

Governor Woods tasted an excellent lunch of Limerick bacon, cabbage and potatoes.

- *Staff Morale*

The Governor had been a little shocked that this was mentioned in the original report as he and his senior staff did not believe that there was a lack of morale. However, the lack of morale is more evident now in the uncertainty of their future. Will they have to move? Will they be absorbed in another part of the system? What is the future of Limerick Prison? The mere fact that a lot of money has been spent on Limerick Prison is no guarantee that it will be retained, as has happened in other institutions. There are mood swings but staff are open to change. A number of staff from Fort Mitchel have recently been transferred to Limerick Prison as result of the closure of Fort Mitchel which adds to the uncertainty for staff and the transfers from Fort Mitchel which most of the staff concerned did not seek.

- *Refurbishment work on C & E and Gate Lodge*

The Inspectorate had been informed from the prisons headquarters that refurbishment work on C & E wings was almost complete and also the gate lodge was being redeveloped and a small extension on the reception/laundry building is now finished. The Inspector saw over the reception area and was very impressed with what was being done there. He was concerned that it was too small for a population of 270 prisoners. The laundry facilities is planning to expand. However, it is awaiting a report from a laundry expert from Belfast (there seems to be experts in practically everything nowadays)!

And on receipt of the report it is hoped expansion work can commence, if finance is available.

The Inspectorate then proceeded to discuss the agreed business plans for Limerick Prison for years 2001 to 2003 and establish if the targets set had been achieved or reached. Herewith are the findings:

**6. Summary of the Business Plans for Limerick Prison 2001 to 2003.**

- 2.1. Devise standard arrangements for recording assaults in the prisoner population by end of '03.

Result; Still awaiting standard arrangement guidelines from Prison Service Headquarters.

- 2.2. Conduct annual audits of prisoners assaults with effect from 2003.

Result; Same as at 2.1. Awaiting instructions from Headquarters.

- 3.1. Complete annual review of security at the prison.

Result; Done and ongoing.

- 3.3. Deploy new technology, where feasible and appropriate, re secure custody of prisoners.(To be done at time of opening of C wing & new radio base.)

Result; Mostly all done, up and running.

- 3.4. Use the prisoner records information system to generate a prisoner profile re their escorts by end of April 2003.

Result; Being done.

- 4.1. Make provisions in business plan for maximum take-up of places in educational, training, & employment facilities within one / two weeks of committal.

Result; Education: Almost all committals are seen by Teacher i/c.

Training:Reasonably good take up on same but if numbers increase may have difficulties in fulfilling same.

Employment: yes being done.

- 5.1. Business plans to provide for maintaining an adequate standard of preparedness in relation to emergency planning at the prison by June 2003.

Result; Review & redraft existing plans: Yes done. Fire plan : up to required standard.

Riot plan: Updated. Hostage negotiation: Being done. Review links with gardai: Done. With fire brigade: Done. With Army: Done. With health service: constant contact with them.

Ensure all staff receive appropriate training: Not done due to resource problems.

Review & replenish existing stocks of emergency equipment: Done & updated.

Establish annual review date: Being done.

5.2. Finalise liaison arrangements with the fire authorities by end of 2003.

Result; Completed.

5.3. Prepare a detailed video record of the prison by the end of 2003 as a reference in emergency.

Result; To be done by Irish Prison Headquarters but not done.

6.1. Make arrangements for a designated drug-free area in the prison by the end of 2003.

Result; Not done.

6.2. Multidisciplinary suicide prevention group within prison to meet quarterly re review suicide prevention methods & look at new initiatives re best practices. Representatives to participate in an annual forum to facilitate information sharing.

Result; Yes being done and on going. Annual forum: Headquarters has not organised same and has not taken place in past year.

7.3. Maintain & expand where possible the use of the prisoner telephone system and other forms of communication between prisoners & their families plus community support agencies by 3/03.

Result; Telephones-phones installed & working. Other communications -Letters ongoing. Community support agencies: Yes constant contact with local community & support agencies.

7.4. Make provisions in the business plans for measures to help prisoners keep in touch with the wider community through improved access to the written & spoken media by January 2003.

Result;Provide newspapers & 'phones and visits plus spl arranged visits outside of normal hours.

18.1. Implement all accepted recommendations, subject to resource provision, contained in the report of the prisoner health care review group by the end of 2003.

Result; No not fully implemented.

8.4. Improve the necessary links with the wider community to ensure continuity of medical treatment for prisoners at times of committal and release.(all in place by end 2003.)

Result; Yes being done, letters being sent to prisoner's local GP.

9.1. Support the process of prisoner induction by providing by mid 2003 an information booklet to each person at the time of committal which explains prisoners entitlements and local prison regimes & services. ( taking into account the provisions of the proposed new prison rules and the requirements in relation to foreign nationals.)

Result; Booklet issued to all new committals. new prison rules: Not in law or in force yet.

Foreign nationals needs: not available, only English language used but little need for any other.

11.3. Maintain the prisoners participation rate in education at 50% against the background of increases in the prisoner population (By June 2003.)

Result; Over 50% at present attending education.

- 11.5. Increase the number of personal development courses for prisoners by June 2003.

Result; Being done by the teachers in the educational classes.

- 11.6. Implement the recommendations of the report of the PE Development group “physical education in the Irish prison system” by end of 2003.

Result; Two small gyms in operation which are not suitable for large numbers, but being done.

- 11.7. Introduce the CONNECT project in the prison by end 2003.

Result; It is introduced to the prison but not fully operational due to H.R. issues.

- 12.1. Implement the structured plan to improve prison library services by end of 2003 and make such other arrangements as are required.

Result; Plans for new library in proposed new educational unit for the prison.

- 12.2. Make provision in the initial business plan for a programme of interaction with the wider community. (completed and ready for review by end of 2003.)



Result; Meetings take place with outside communities but not formal structured meetings.

- 13.1. The prison to deliver at least one multidisciplinary programme per annum addressing offending behaviour relevant to the prison's prisoner population by end of 2003.

Result; Not happening at present.

- 14.1. Evaluate the effectiveness of all prisoner programmes by the end of 2003.

Result; Four of the five workshops' workers are certifiable. ( Not prisoner programmes.)

- 14.2. Ensure that at least 80% of work training course are pursued to recognised certification levels by the end of 2003.

Result; Done.

- 28.1. Prepare business plans for the prison and headquarters directorate by February 2003.

Result; Done for 2003 but not updated or done for 2004 onwards.

**Section D. Operational responsibilities / activities involved in running the prison.**

D.1.1. To improve the external elevation of the prison by October 2003.

Result;-On-going.

D.1.2. To improve facilities for visitors to prison in waiting area by June 03.

Result;-Done.

D.1.3. Maintain hygiene award in kitchen & set targets for "Excellent Ireland" award by June 2003. Result; Done and achieved.

1D.1.4. S.C.B.A. have 50% of all staff refreshed in donning & doffing by 6/2003.

Result;- Done.

D.1.5. Display offenders art work in prison & community yearly.

Result; Done by teachers.

D.1.6. To improve wheelchair accessibility to prison by June 2003.

Result; Done.

D.1.7. Chaplaincy to continue to organise bible studies group, meditation groups, religious services, challenging offenders behaviour and available for individual listening and to be prepared to work with all professionals within the prison.

Result:Being done at present by the Chaplains.

D.1.8. Provide a structured approach to counselling, involving professionally accredited counsellors to 20 sessions per week initially covering a variety of disciplines by 12/02.

Result;3 counsellors at present & awaiting the appointment of a health board appointee.

D.1.9. Liaison group to meet formally & review all areas of its existing responsibilities and those envisaged under the strategic management plan.(by March 03.)

Result; Done.

D.1.10 Area of functional responsibilities allocated to A.C.O.s.

Result; Done.

D.1.11. Put in place a class officer's journal consistent with the targets in the business plan.

Result; No not done to date.

D.1.12. Set up committee to make recommendations re future structural developments with the prison.(Yearly)

Result;Yes happening & ongoing.

D.1.13. Establish internal & external collaborative training activity links for offending behaviour programmes.(by April 02.)

Result; Not done.

D.1.14. Review existing practice re staff services locally by Feb. 02.

Result; Yes done,on-going.

D.1.15. Seek info from other institutions as to practices re staff services.

Result;Yes ongoing.

D.1.16. Identify new resources / facilities needed for staff services.

Result;Done.

D.1.17. Put in place a consultative process to review local services.

Result;Yes being done.

D.1.18. Explore the possibility of developing a room for family visits within prison.

Result; Not done.

D.1.19. Develop an information leaflet for visitors to prisoners by 3/03.

Result; Not done.

D.1.20. Put in place improved addiction counselling services by 9/03.

Result; Awaiting appointee.

D.1.21. Increase work & training places by 9/03.

Result; Being reviewed but not up & running.

Convene meetings of planning team to measure progress against agreed targets and time scales at two monthly intervals.

Result; Yes being done on an ongoing basis.

## **7. Tour of Inspection**

The Inspectorate team visited the domestic science room in the refurbished female prison section but no teachers were available as it was the mid-term break. The domestic science room appears to be fully used as on our previous inspection it was just opened but not in use. We also visited the exercise yard and the gym which were adequate.

- *New "C" Wing*

The Inspectorate team saw the new C wing and viewed some of the new cells. They are very satisfactory and each are fitted with a semi concealed toilet and wash hand basin. It ensures privacy when you are looking from the door. It is unfortunate that a shower was not included in this unit's cells as it could easily have done with one. Once again the excuse was money. However, if one is building a new prison, as was this wing, it is a missed opportunity. A shower would have lasted for a very long period. The windows were based on a design in the Midlands Prison where there had been problems with same but are now resolved. Two thirds of the window has a blind behind the glass or perspex which can be adjusted to eradicate natural light. A third panel is for air control and seems very efficient. The cell was very warm but within seconds of opening the door and this vent frosty air had permeated the entire cell. We also visited the urine testing room which has mirrors on all the walls and ceiling mainly to prevent prisoners altering samples by adding toothpaste or other distracting substance. The new wing holds 39 prisoners on C2 plus 32 prisoners on each of the other two landings C3 and C4.

- *New Visiting Area*

We visited the new visitors centre which is a state of the art one which has first class video surveillance. They claim it is better than the Midlands which is deemed as the best in the country. A section of the large visiting area can be divided off with sliding doors for professional visits, or for visits for those prisoners on protection.

- *New Radio Room/Control Room*

The Inspectorate visited the newly opened facility which is located in the upper floor of the newly refurbished section close to the main administration area. It is a very modern control room with monitors being viewed by staff of the activities of the prison. The radio control centre plus all of the I.T back up equipment required to operate and record the activities is operated from this area. This is a wonderful improvement on the facilities that were at the prison and the working conditions for staff have been upgraded immensely.

Although they state that the work load has increased with the introduction of extra C.C.T.V's, new gates operating control systems, plus the operating of the audio visual contact system. The Inspector wishes to congratulate all concerned in providing this fine new facility and equipment.

*Meeting with the POA*

The Inspectorate met two of the P.O.A'S branch officers at their request. They were very worried at the increase in hard drugs. (There was always hash now there is cocaine heroin "E" and powder substances being found on searches).

They were also predictably concerned about cutbacks and the effect on the security of the prison and staffs security. As a result of the cutbacks there are no visits on Tuesdays and no staff assigned to let prisoners out of their cells after 8.00p.m to use the toilets.

They stated that the opening of the "C" wing was too rushed and it was done in order to facilitate the closure of Fort Mitchell. The result is that proper

services are not being met. There is not enough time for proper reception screening. They state that the new visitors waiting room is too small as well as being a serious security risk. They outlined that this new facility should have been built outside of the boundary wall like most of the other prisons, as well as no staff toilet provided for in the refurbished area.

They outlined their concerns regarding not having a room set aside in the local hospital for prisoners and staff to wait until called by the medical staff.

They complained that the ratio of male staff working in the female prison is far too high and there are times when a male officer is on his own during lock up which is not acceptable to the union.

The effects of the cut backs were again raised as well as lack of facilities for "D" class and "C" class prisoners plus the refurbishment of the A & B divisions where slopping out of chamber pots still exist.

#### **8. *Annual Report by the Prison's Visiting Committee for Year 2003***

The Inspector then concerned himself with the annual report of the Limerick Prison's Visiting Committee and their work from the 1st January 2003 to the 9th December 2003. The Inspector congratulates them on liaising with the probation and welfare staff as recommended. The last death of a prisoner in custody was May 2003. The committee noted with regret his death. They say "a post mortem is awaited to find the cause of death". The committee is concerned about the undue delay in the return of the toxicology report.

Apparently the Gardai have received a copy but it is alleged that it is the coroner who can't release it. The Inspector asked the Governor to contact the city coroner to ask when the visiting committee, the Governor and the



Inspector could get a copy of the toxicology report. The visiting committee noted that the recreation yards are covered by a permanent netting but unfortunately contraband is being thrown onto these nets and then knocked down by prisoners using handballs and footballs. The committee recommended that secondary nets be installed to prevent this activity from happening. The Governor has installed temporary secondary nets and the committee is recommending that these temporary nets be replaced by permanent netting. I was informed that this matter is receiving attention. The Visiting Committee also noted the recent introduction of a detox programme at Limerick and the discontinuation of the maintenance programmes. The Committee is of the opinion that this should only be undertaken as part of a structured programme with all the resources a detox programme demands i.e counselling etc.

The Visiting Committee note the agreement between the Mid Western Health Board, Limerick Prison and the Irish Prison Service Headquarters to provide counselling services for those that want to get off drugs as part of the structured programme.

The Visiting Committee also states:- it costs around €1,300 per week to keep a prisoner in detention. The committee is concerned in regard to the release of prisoners when the necessary back up facilities are not in place or are not available to integrate them back into society and to gain employment. Some prisoners leave with little or no financial resources. This in particular is not good enough and needs urgent attention. All prisoners when leaving will

receive an information leaflet giving details of social services, health services and probation and welfare services. This comprehensive document of the relevant agencies covering the Southern area will be available in 2004. [The Inspectorate was pleased to hear that a printed copy of this document was handed to all prisoners on their departure. It is very clear and helpful.]

The Visiting Committee is concerned that no new members have been appointed to replace those who have completed their term of office. However the explanation given is that the Minister is going to revise the law regarding visiting committees. However, the opinion of the Inspector on this is a matter of great urgency. The visiting committee has very very limited powers and in a period where there is much manifestation of secrecy power and control it is essential that the public has an effective watchdog with real powers.

## **9. Summary**

The major change on entering Limerick Prison from our previous full inspection is the new "C" wing which has just been commissioned. The last time we inspected there was hoarding surrounding the entire area and it appeared like a building site with the other parts of the prison operating alongside. This newly rebuilt wing appears to be completed to a high standard and gives a good impression of the prison on entering from the main gate area. The removal of the temporary office accommodation and the installation of the proposed water feature will further add to its appearance which is very welcomed.

There were nine recommendations made arising from previous inspection and of these only three have been fully implemented i.e additional punch bags, bullying being kept under review by Governor and fire drill training exercises. The facilities for visitors arriving early for visits will come into operation in a month or so while the expansion to the library area, providing a new medical area with waiting room and extra educational facilities within the one area will all be catered for in the proposed new wing but this could take up to at least another two years before completion. The value of the vouchers to prisoners for work done above the norm has not been unified across the services by Headquarters. The psychiatric care for prisoners is still not on par with that provided in general community.

The conclusion of the full inspection report highlighted some concerns such as the design of the dignity screen in the cells of the female prisoners which has not changed. The visiting committee members and the Probation and Welfare staff now meet which had not been happening previously.

The food served to prisoners is now distributed on delph plates as before paper plates were used. The refurbishment work on C & E and gate lodge is almost completed. The staff morale does not appear to have improved and may have got worse with the budgetary cutbacks and the uncertainty of their future role within the service.

The business plans for the prison for years 2001 and 2003 contained 26 targets outlined from 2:1 to 28:1 and of these 15 were completed on time and

targets met, four were partly completed, while seven others were not reached. This highlights the practice of outlining targets, setting time scales and completion dates on a considerable number of issues which have not been reached. So realistic targets should be set and those responsible for their implementation should show reasons as to why such is not happening if targets are not met, otherwise business plans are a waste of time and energy.

The prison was clean and there appeared to be good working relationships between staff and prisoners. The newly refurbished sections are a wonderful improvement on the old buildings. There are great plans for further improvements which is very encouraging. There is an urgent need to refurbish the A & B divisions.

There are concerns regarding the outcome of the industrial relations negotiations which are taking place at present between the P.O.A., the Minister/Headquarters and the Labour Relations Officer. The cutbacks in the budgetary allowance being implemented at present may have a knock on effect on services and programmes for prisoners which would be a pity if such were to happen. The sooner an agreement is reached the better for all concerned.

The Inspectorate wishes to thank the Governor and staff for their help and hospitality and for providing an office for our stay at the prison. It was very much appreciated.