

IRISH PRISONS INSPECTORATE

LOUGHAN HOUSE

REVISIT INSPECTION OF LOUGHAN HOUSE
PLACE OF DETENTION
24th May 2005 and 13th February 2006

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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REVISIT INSPECTION OF LOUGHAN HOUSE PLACE OF DETENTION

24TH MAY 2005 AND 13TH FEBRUARY 2006

1. INTRODUCTION

The Inspector of Prisons & Places of Detention Mr. Justice Dermot Kinlen was revisited Loughan House on 24th May 2005. His Special Advisor Jim Woods returned on the 13th February 2006.

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 May 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.

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.

Report on revisit to Loughan House Place of Detention

A full inspection of Loughan House was carried out on the 19th and 20th May 2003. A report was produced, which was a snapshot of what was found by myself and my colleagues during that inspection. We made various recommendations and suggestions. An interim inspection, to monitor changes since the original report, was carried out on 24th May '05 and 13th February '06.

I had anticipated a great deal of despondency because of the uncertainty of the future of this institution. The Minister had made it clear that in the Autumn of 2005 that if his dispute with the POA was not resolved that he would turn Loughan House, under separate management from the IPS, into a halfway house for prisoners at the end of their sentences. Agreement was reached and the status quo remains.

After a full inspection my Inspectorate made various suggestions and recommendations. The then Governor responded, as did the IPS, very positively. The said Governor has been promoted since then. He is the first member of the Prison Service to become one of the Directors in the Headquarters bureaucracy. He has been succeeded by Ms. Comerford, whom I have known for many years. She told me that on the day of my visitation there were 86 persons in custody and ten on temporary release. She told me that the capacity has now increased to 110 prisoners. On the previous visitation there was a hideous filthy decaying visitor-reception area with a blocked toilet in the gents. That entire building has been demolished. Where it stood is now level and ready for seeding with grass or shrubs or both.

An entirely new, long, two-storey building has been constructed on the old site since my last visit. The Governor's office, a boardroom and other offices are now accommodated on the second floor of the new building. Part of the ground floor contains an impressive new workshop which I inspected. A

number of prisoners were working there on an outside contract. It was a bright, large, airy room and very impressive. A new visiting room has also been provided in the new building, which again is very clean, bright and airy. There is a number of round tables and chairs in it and a tea/coffee-making facility. The building is fitted with modern clean toilets and wash-hand basins.

The following are the recommendations in the original report. After each recommendation I will record the present situation.

Recommendations

1. The position regarding adequate psychiatric services should be discussed with the doctor, the Governor and the Prison Service Headquarters and a suitable service put in place immediately. The Department of Health and Children should provide a psychiatric hospital cover for Loughan House as indeed all prisons.

Present Position: Not done. There is no change in the situation. Generally prisoners with any mental illness, or on medication for a psychiatric disorder are not selected for transfer to Loughan House.

2. A psychologist should be appointed to the prison.

Present Position: No psychology service has been provided. The Governor requested one, but was told it was not possible to provide such a service from the present pool of psychology staff.

3. The surgery should be removed downstairs or a lift should be provided alongside the stairway which would carry incapacitated patients up and down.

Present Position: There has been no change. There are no suitable rooms, i.e. bedrooms, on the ground floor and in order to provide a surgery it would mean changing the use of an existing room (almost all of which are recreation rooms, dining hall, etc. and all of them are quite large). The central stairs are being examined at present regarding their condition and perhaps a lift may replace them. [They are awaiting the outcome of the feasibility study]

4. The visitor centre should be replaced urgently (the gents' toilet in it is out of order). The whole building is decaying.

Present Position: It has been replaced by an excellent new building and an outdoor childrens' play area which is fitted with a slide, climbing and bouncing contraptions. The childrens play area is enclosed with timber railings and the surface is fitted with special soft type rubber tiles. Another timber-railed enclosed area, adjacent to the childrens' play area, includes picnic tables and seats where visitors can enjoy sitting out in good weather.

5. The shelved new workshop should be built immediately.

Present Position: This has been done and has already been described in this report.

6. If she is agreeable, the Killeshandra based nun should be made a full-time Chaplain without pay. This would enable her to attend the Chaplains' meetings. At the moment she is a volunteer and she wants to continue in that capacity. The Inspector intends to talk to the Head Chaplain about this particular matter. The Bishop of Kilmore will also have to be contacted as he provides chaplains to Loughan House.

Present Position: I had intended to take up the matter with the Head Chaplain but (Mea Maxma Culpa) did not do so, but intend to talk to the chaplain as soon as possible. [Perhaps the nun may not be as

anxious now to become a full-time chaplain as she was at time of the full inspection]

7. An extraction fan should be put into the cooking area of the kitchen.

Present Position: The kitchen is being fitted with new equipment and the fans within the canopy over the cooking area are working perfectly.

8. All bedrooms are in need of repainting and renovation.

Present Position: All the bedrooms have been renovated and newly painted. New wardrobes have been fitted, the wash-hand basins have been enclosed in work-top type timber frame and new shelves provided. The old curtains have been removed from the windows and replaced with blinds and new noticeboards placed on the walls. A wonderful improvement from the original inspection.

9. Missing wall tiles in the toilet area should be replaced.

Present Position: All the toilet blocks have been renovated and new tiles fixed $\frac{3}{4}$ way up the walls. New cubicles have also been installed. There are new tiles on the floors of the toilet blocks and they are clean, but whatever type of material they are made from gives the impression that they are dirty. Detergents are not allowed to be used on them for environmental reasons. These floor tiles are the subject of investigation by the Prison Service Building Section at present. Again a great improvement in the overall hygiene of the toilet areas and the new wall tiles and cubicles are excellent.

10. The call-bells in the two isolation rooms should be repaired and become usable. This is a matter of high priority [why these rooms are being used at all is questionable. I was assured that they are very seldom used

Present Position: New bells are now installed and work when activated; each turns on a red light outside the door in the corridor and on the control-room panel in the A.C.O's office.

11. The curtains in the shower cubicles and the timber seating are in need of replacement and repair. The whole toilet and washroom area requires repainting. The overall hygiene within the toilet/washroom areas could be improved.

Present Position: A new railing with curtains has been installed in each shower cubicle and the cubicles were clean and tidy. However, the walls and the dividing walls of the cubicles are covered in tarazzo type material, which has been in place for many years. The wall coverings could do with being replaced, but the areas were clean and fitted with non-slip mats.

12. The dental surgery should become operational as soon as possible. The engineer should be required as a matter of great priority to repair the air compressor.

Present Position: This work was carried out and the dental surgery is now fully operational.

13. The addiction counsellor from the North Western Health Board should be restored.

Present Position: No counsellor has been appointed, nor has the addiction counsellor from the Health Authority been restored. In fact the position has got worse. The Probation and Welfare Officer provided drug awareness counselling, but since mid January 2006 the services of the Probation and Welfare Officer has been withdrawn and now there is no probation service at all in the centre.

14. The football field needs attention as presently it is dangerous.

Present Position: Not done. No funding has been provided to date for this work.

15. The training of the staff in the use of breathing apparatus equipment and in fire drill and in evacuation proceedings requires immediate attention.

Present Position: The Governor states that B.A. training is not required in open centres as prisoners can leave their rooms of their own accord (not locked in). Two fire-drill evacuations have taken place in the past year.

There has been a lot of work carried out, instigated by my previous inspection's recommendations, but some of the recommendations have still not been implemented. No psychologist, no counsellor, no Probation and Welfare Officer and the part-time chaplain are all areas of concern. The football pitch, being unable to be used due to its condition, denies a very worthwhile amenity to the prisoners.

The renovation of the bedrooms and the painting carried out is welcomed. Some more needs to be done, especially the rear side stairs, the central stairs, the corridor leading to the dining hall and the "recreation " corridor. The new building with its workshops, visiting centre, children's play area, and administration offices is a great improvement for all these areas. The installation of a new control room, change-of-use of the governor's old office, the general office and the A.C.O's room are all positive improvements. The overall cleanliness and hygiene of the centre has been improved. A lot done more to do!!!

I would repeat some of the conclusions in the original report. I am not sure if Loughan House is used to its full potential. It can now hold over 100 prisoners and there should be proper work/work training/education for all of them. A prisoner should have longer part of his sentence to serve when sent to the open centre, rather than the last few weeks of his sentence, as the present practice leaves it very difficult to provide meaningful work or education.

There was an uncertainty about the centre's future due to the industrial relations problems in the Prison Service, but as these have now been resolved there should be a major review of the open centres regarding exploiting their full potential. The centres most definitely have their benefits and a place in the justice system, but these need to be planned and financed, so the centres can be used to their maximum.

I am grateful to Governor Comerford for her warm welcome and for her full and frank replies to my queries. She cheerfully gave of her time to

accompany the inspectorate on the tour of the buildings/landings etc. It was much appreciated.

