

*Midlands Prison,  
Dublin Road,  
Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois  
Telephone 0502-72110*



*Príosún Lár Na Tíre,  
Bóthar Átha Cliath,  
Port Laoise,  
Co. Laoise.  
Telefón 0502-72110*

Minister M. Mc Dowell,  
Department of Justice, Equality  
& Law Reform,  
94 St. Stephen's Green,  
Dublin 2.

15/12/05

Dear Minister,

The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to present its Annual Report for the year 2005.

### **Prisoners' Requests.**

During the course of the year the committee met with a total of 25 prisoners. Most of their requests related to transfer applications. Various other issues arose and were dealt with satisfactorily. It would appear that prisoners in the Midlands are generally content with their conditions.

### **Probation & Welfare Service**

The committee is pleased to note that the Probation & Welfare service reached its full complement of staff during 2005. One senior officer and one officer to each wing was put in place, which made for better access to the service for prisoners. Plans are afoot to re-establish the Lifers' Group in the New Year and also to begin addiction focussed group work.

### **Psychiatric Services**

After a delay of five years, one full time and one part time psychologist were finally assigned to the prison in early 2005. A Psychiatrist was assigned permanently to the Prisons Service and visits each prison once per week. Two Community Psychiatric Nurses also visit the prison twice a week. The addition of these professionals is welcomed by the committee and has greatly enhanced the service offered to prisoners at the Midlands.

Where appropriate the Psychology Service seeks to refer prisoners to local mental health services upon release. Prisoners who live in outlying areas are referred to their own local services.

### **Medical Services**

Two resident Doctors and a full complement of nursing staff continue to provide a comprehensive service with the assistance of the following;

- ❖ The Dentist provides a twice weekly service.
- ❖ An Optician is available on request
- ❖ A Chiropodist is also available as required.

The committee recommends that an audit of the nursing area be carried out in order to establish whether the all of the expertise of the nursing staff is being fully exploited. We would also like to see drug and alcohol treatment programmes and stricter controls of drugs entering the prison; the use of a sniffer dog would appear to be the most efficient method of preventing illicit substances from entering the prison.

### **Positive Sentence Management**

Monthly reviews were held at the prison, with the attendance of an official from the Operations Directorate, during which applications for transfer or temporary release were considered. Prisoners were transferred to other prisons according to their revised security category or released on temporary release in order to take up employment or for re-socialisation prior to full release.

At the time of writing discussions were at an advanced stage in relation to putting into place a linkage programme for prisoners who would be nearing the end of their sentences. This would involve the Probation & Welfare services, F.A.S. and related agencies. The aim of the project is to try and procure continuation of training and/or employment for offenders on release.

### **Work/Training/Education Opportunities.**

The wide range of activities available to occupy offenders during unlock hours continues to be fully utilised, with useful training provided to assist offenders to secure employment on release.

## **Developments**

The committee welcomed a number of developments in the work training and education areas during the year, in particular the extension of drama and related activities, the addition of extra Gymnasium facilities and the expansion of the craft and tiling workshops; all of which enhance the wide range of services to prisoners at the Midlands.

New observation cells to replace the old padded/strip cells were under construction at the time of writing. This is a very welcome improvement in the way that mentally unstable or violent prisoners are accommodated and monitored.

## **Conclusion**

- Having spoken with the Governor on the problem of mobile phones in the prison, the committee recommend the purchase of equipment to either monitor or block the use of such phones by prisoners.
- The lack of a proper church remains a contentious issue and the committee feels that, as the Chaplaincy is part of the overall programme for anyone detained for whatever reason, a multi-denominational church or facility should be put in place urgently to improve the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of prisoners wishing to avail of it.
- The committee feels that facilities should be improved to rehabilitate drug and alcohol dependent offenders as these prisoners may seek compensation in the future if this is not achieved while in prison, prior to release.
- We welcomed the visit of the Inspector of Prisons, Justice Dermot Kinlan and discussed with him ideas to improve the welfare, education and pre-release preparation of offenders, which the Judge agreed were in need of attention.
- We also welcome the purchase of the new cellular van to be used by PSEC, which will mean better security of escorts and hopefully a reduction in the cost of transporting prisoners.
- During the year the committee met with some prisoners serving short sentences for relatively minor offences i.e. motoring offences, breach of barring order etc. The committee felt that such prisoners would be better served if accommodated in a more sheltered environment and not exposed to hardened criminals and drug addicts. A separate area

within a prison, or a separate building altogether might be more appropriate to the needs of these petty offenders.

- Finally we would like to thank the Governor, Mr. John O' Sullivan and his secretary, Yvonne Donohoe for their assistance throughout the year. We also acknowledge the co-operation of the staff of the Midlands and the good work carried out at the prison during 2005. We extend the best wishes of the committee to the staff and management for the New Year. The committee would also like to compliment the Minister for his ongoing efforts to reform the prison system.

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Colm Wylie (Chairperson)

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Briget Teefy (Vice Chairperson)

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Theresa Mulhare

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Colette Fennelly

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John Sheehy

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Paddy Boland.

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Jody Gunning

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Jim Casey

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Michael Mc Keever

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Jack Bourke

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Jennifer Murnane O' Connor

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Nuala Halpin.