

**Minister Alan Shatter
Dept. Of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
94 St Stephens Green
Dublin 2
20 December 2011**

Dear Minister,

**Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to
present its Annual report for the year 2011.**

Introduction:

The Committee would like to thank the following members for their time and commitment to this committee:

Mr S Kelly

Mr P Greaney

Mr M Leonard

Mr M Daly

Mr L Mc Entire

Mr F Fitsimons

Mr E Brady

The number of members on the Visiting Committee is now a total of three. While the members are very aware of the problems in the public finances we find it very hard to be as effective, as to when we had twelve members. We would ask the Minister to look at providing some extra members to help with the very important work done by this Committee.

The Committee meet the first Thursday of each month and meet with any prisoners who wish to talk to them. These meetings are very well attended with monthly visits to the prison and a comprehensive tour taken of the prison during these visits.

Officers Canteen:

It was with some concern that the Committee learned that the canteen facilities were to close daily at 3pm and no cover at the weekend, as the current contract with the company was falling due for renewal. Taking into account that the staff come on duty at 8am and do not finish until 8pm with no hot meal for the staff on duty during the Saturday and Sunday was not acceptable to this Committee. The Governor has now put new arrangements in

place to ensure that the staff have access to a hot meal during the day.

Closure of Roscommon A+E:

The current closure of the A+E in Roscommon will have a big impact on the prison in that if any prisoner requiring urgent medical treatment after hours will have to go to Galway or Castlebar, increasing the travel time and distance involved thus increasing the hours of the staff involved in the escort.

Tagging of Prisoners:

A long term patient in the hospital was tagged thereby freeing up more staff for the prison. This is where the new tagging system comes into its own and is a brilliant resource to have available to each prison.

Prisoners before the committee:

In addition to the offenders that the committee have 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. The small number of offenders requesting to see the committee is taken as an indication of how well the prison is being run.

School:

The work done in the school area once again is to be commended with a very high level of interest in the classes provided, with some classes been over subscribed. The various levels of exams also with prisoners taking on the leaving cert, junior cert and taking part in the Open University. With extra pressure put on the resources available to cover the new Harristown Unit. This Unit is where the protection prisoners are housed and cannot mix with the general population.

Comparative Prison Visit:

During the year, Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee visited Shelton Abbey for a Comparative Prison Visit. The visit was a great success. We were very impressed with the facilities available in Shelton with the great work undertaken in the farm and the great work done for charities gives Shelton Abbey brilliant PR, and rightly so. We would like to thank the Governor and Staff of Shelton Abbey for their hospitality on the day.

Suicides:

It was with great sadness that the Committee learned of a death in custody (April 2011). It was believed that the suicide was a drug overdose and the Committee would like to pass on their condolences to his family. The Committee are aware that prison is a reflection of the society that we live in and that unfortunately suicide is part of that current environment. This does not take away from the fact that a prisoner died in custody and the Committee are very aware of the impact on the staff members involved in this incident.

Chaplaincy:

Margaret Connaughton is the lay chaplain 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.

Kitchen:

On the many visits to Castlerea the members were always very impressed by the kitchen area in Castlerea prison, not only the quality of the food produced here and the hygiene of this work area but more than this is the great employment given to the 20 or so prisoners involved in preparing, cooking, serving the food and the clean up afterwards.

Committal on Fines:

Castlerea is a committal prison but the resources put into people coming into prison for none payment of fines over the last year would have to be looked at. The Garda have to bring him to the prison, the prison have to commit him the same as any other prisoner and process him through the office and reception. People committed on fines are normally given temporary release and discharged with a travel voucher, this is more expense to the State.

Conclusion:

The committee was very concerned in relation to the levels in Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee (as outlined above). 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 Members Annual Report 2011

MR M NEVIN

MR S KILGANNON

MS M SCANLON
