

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
94 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Report of the Visiting Committee, Dóchas Centre to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Membership

From April 2011, Dóchas V.C. consisted of only two members, which is a cause of great concern. Members feel that a full reinstatement of a Visiting Committee is crucial to the full monitoring of prison conditions. Despite limited membership the Committee has undertaken a full regime of visits and members made themselves available to prisoners throughout the year.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the open manner in which Governor O'Connor dealt with the V.C. and the courtesy shown to the Committee by all members of staff.

Staffing

Staff have shown strong commitment to the good running of the prison and humane attitude towards prisoners in Dochas.

However, staffing levels remained an issue of concern during 2011, with demands on Dochas prison for escorts and occasional cover to Mt Joy significantly impacting on staff availability within the prison.

Education

Education is an important part of rehabilitation. Dóchas have a dedicated, enthusiastic and professional teaching staff. Courses offered include: literacy courses, industrial sewing and hairdressing classes, artwork and computer courses, as well as a variety of FETAC courses in subjects such as food safety and catering. Take up by students is high.

In 2011, six students studied for Open University degrees and nine students successfully completed some modules of FETAC level 5.

Locked yards continued in 2011, which seriously disrupted class attendance. The lack of officer availability for supervision has greatly impacted on the educational services to the students in the school. This makes it impossible for the students to complete all the modules in the level 5 and level 6 exams. This has seriously affected morale and motivation and also the type of certification offered. The library is only open two days a week.

Health

Dochas has a dedicated unit staffed by suitably qualified personnel. A doctor and nurse are available to meet the daily medical needs of the prisoners. The GP clinic is held every morning and a nurse is available 24 hours. The VC has expressed their concern over the availability of dental services which, at one afternoon per fortnight, is insufficient for the numbers wanting dental care. In particular, this is an issue for long term prisoners as emergency work is prioritised.

The Visiting Committee is concerned for the welfare of prisoners suffering from serious mental health issues and questions whether they can be adequately cared for in Dóchas.

Physical Environment

The V.C. welcomes the installation of nets over the main yard which has greatly restricted the movement of drugs in to the prison.

Accommodation and general maintenance standards have deteriorated

A new building planned for Dóchas is a serious backward step for the prison. The high numbers that are planned for this building constitute a risk to the health, safety and welfare of prisoners and are to be regretted.

In particular, the Committee is fearful regarding:

- Overcrowding: 9 per room is not acceptable in a modern prison**
 - Limited bathroom facilities**
 - Heating/ventilation is a major concern**
-
- Possible tensions and unrest due to overcrowding and lack of differentiation among prisoners**

Prisoner Welfare

The V.C. wishes to draw attention to greatly reduced staff numbers.

Provision of underwear was a big issue for prisoners as they are not allowed to access their own and fresh supplies were out of stock in the prison.

Visits

Visitation bookings to Dóchas are controlled by Mountjoy Visiting Services. With this in mind, it has been made known that access to Dóchas by telephone has proven very difficult for family members wishing to visit. This has caused undue distress to prisoners.

In conclusion, the V.C. would again re-iterate the importance of re-instating a full visiting committee for Dochas.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Governor O'Connor and all members of staff for their cooperation during 2011.

We would like to express our gratitude to the V.C. members whose term expired in April 2011.

Marie Murphy

Marie "The Shamrock" Murphy

Jacqui McConville

Jacqui McConville