

*Midlands Prison,  
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Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois  
Telephone 0502-2110*



*Príosún Lár Na Tíre,  
Bóthar Átha Cliath,  
Port Laoise,  
Co. Laoise.  
Telefón 0502-2110*

Minister M. Mc Dowell,  
Department of Justice, Equality  
& Law Reform,  
72-76 St. Stephen's Green,  
Dublin 2.

14/12/04

Dear Minister,

The Midlands Prison Visiting Committee is pleased to present its Annual Report for the year 2004.

### **Statistics**

During the course of the year the committee dealt with a total of 30 prisoners. Most of their requests related to transfer applications (10). Other issues which arose were related to T.R./Escorted outings (2), Complaints against staff (4), Intimidation from other prisoners (3) and 4 prisoners wished to contest P19s or have remission restored. All requests were resolved satisfactorily.

### **Developments**

The committee is pleased to report that a number of issues raised in the report of 2003 have been addressed constructively i.e.

- ✓ Access to the perimeter wall has been almost completely cut off with a noticeable reduction in the supply of drugs into the prison.
- ✓ Houses in the adjoining Beladd Park have almost all been demolished and access from that side is also cut off.
- ✓ Multi disciplinary teams meeting on an average of once per month on each wing.
- ✓ A number of programmes aimed at helping prisoners to stop smoking have been run during the year.

### **Probation & Welfare Service**

However, it would appear that the Probation and Welfare service is still understaffed and at the time of writing this report the service was reduced to two staff, consisting of 1 Senior Officer and 1 Welfare Officer. Two of their number were out on extended maternity/sick leave and one had transferred to Portlaoise Prison, with no replacement yet. The required number for a full staff complement is 1 Senior Officer and 5 Officers. Bearing in mind the important role played by the Probation and Welfare service in preparing prisoners for release the committee felt that the current situation was unacceptable.

### **Psychiatric Services**

On a positive note the prisoners who had transferred from the Curragh on the closure of that institution have settled into the environment well and almost half have been released on remission. However, as sex offenders from the Curragh and other prisons now make up a quarter of the Midlands population the committee would like to express its serious concern at the lack of Psychological/Psychiatric services. It is understood that a visiting Psychologist conducts a clinic twice weekly to deal with the Curragh prisoners and that occasionally a Psychiatrist will visit from the C.M.H. The unfortunate shortcomings of the Psychiatric/Psychological services places an unfair burden on the auxiliary services i.e. Probation & Welfare, Medical staff and Chaplains. There is no sex offenders' programme currently at the Midlands which the committee finds somewhat disconcerting given the high number of such prisoners and the obvious danger to society on their release.

### **Medical Services**

Two resident Doctors and a full complement of nursing staff provide a very satisfactory service.

### **Drug Treatment Programmes**

The committee welcomes the Minister's proposals in relation to the mandatory drug testing of all prisoners and looks forward significant improvements in the area of drug treatment, detox programmes etc.

## **Positive Sentence Management**

Improvements in the area of Positive Sentence Management would be welcomed. The idea of an all inclusive programme for each prisoner, to include education, work/training, Probation & Welfare and Psychology service, along with the involvement of multidisciplinary teams should be looked at with a view to giving prisoners a focus from the beginning of their sentence and to preparing them for their eventual release.

The committee also recommends the setting up of a pre release programme and step down facility for all prisoners in final stage of their sentence, to include training in basic living skills such as cookery and money management etc. Links could be forged with outside agencies like FÁS, CERT and FETEC with a view to securing employment for offenders on release.

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

A wide range of activities is available to occupy offenders during unlock hours and the following is a breakdown of numbers availing of work/education opportunities in each area;

Education	120-130
Work/Training	80-100
Horticulture	25
Kitchen	25
Cleaning	45

An average of one hundred prisoners are accommodated on A Wing and these prisoners, who are on protection, are educated separately from the main body of the prison. Classes are conducted on A Wing during mornings afternoons and evening times, with each class catering for approximately 30 offenders. These offenders also have access to a Gymnasium and outdoor exercise each day.

An average of 12 offenders are accommodated on C1 (punishment area) and these offenders can avail of one hour outdoor exercise per day.

## **Conclusion**

- In conclusion the committee is satisfied with the range of services and facilities available to offenders at the Midlands Prison but would like to see a Sex Offenders Programme in operation in the New Year in view of the fact that this category of offender now makes up one quarter of the Midlands population.
- Psychiatric and Psychological care remains sadly lacking at the prison and the committee urges the Minister to take steps to secure professional people for this area in the New Year.
- The Probation and Welfare service was grossly understaffed at the time of writing this report and the committee has serious concerns about the effect this has on prisoners, particularly those reaching the end of their sentence.
- Finally it is felt that more needs to be done to assist those with addictions, particularly drug addictions, to address their difficulties in a constructive manner and a drug treatment programme for the Midlands should be a priority for 2005.

## **Acknowledgement**

The Visiting Committee wishes to acknowledge the co-operation of Governor John O' Sullivan, his secretary Yvonne Donohoe and his staff throughout the prison for their assistance in providing the information for the compilation of this report.

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Nuala Halpin (Chairperson)

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Paddy Boland.

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