

Annual Report

Visiting Committee St. Patrick's Institution, Dublin.

Year ended 31st December 2004.

We the visiting committee wish to submit the following as the report of our activities for the year gone by. This committee met monthly in St Patrick's Institution and the committee members also carried out in excess of twenty unannounced visits to the prison to ensure that everything in the prison was being run in an efficient, fair, safe and humanitarian way and are pleased to confirm that this has always been the case. We wish to place on record the fact that in this institution the welfare of the prisoners is of primary concern and wish to record our thanks and appreciation to the Governor and his staff for their excellent management and running of the institution.

We also wish to offer our sincere sympathies to the communities and relatives of Sr. Ann and Br. John two true friends of St. Patrick's who passed away this year.

At lock up on the 31st December 2004 the population of St. Patrick's was 182. Made up of 21 remand prisoners and 161 convicted prisoners. There were 59 prisoners aged between 16 and 17 years. There were 63 prisoners accommodated in the Drug Free Unit.

We will address our activities and concerns under the following headings.

Food:

This committee again wishes to place on record that we have received no complaints regarding food in this year or for that matter in the last number of years. Food is prepared in a very efficient manner by a very professional staff and members of the prison population are also employed in the kitchen. Inmates are trained and accredited under the auspices of the prison. The kitchen continues to perform well in its annual Cert Audits and we place our congratulations on the record. We feel that food is appropriate, well varied and of a high quality and we also feel that waste is kept to a minimum.

Accommodation

Cells: No Complaints have been received from prisoners regarding their cells which all have a self-contained toilet. Prisoners have not complained of overcrowding and on our visits we have yet to note it or have it brought to our attention.

Each cell is also equipped for television reception and each prisoner has access to a television set for his cell. This is very important, as it is part of the prisons integrated approach to help prevent and reduce suicide and self-harm. It also helps to relieve boredom during the long hours of confinement. A dedicated television channel especially showing literacy type programmes is continually available on the television, which allows the inmates to study the basics of literacy in the privacy of their cell away from the gaze of their peers, and we fully endorse this action. In addition the Inmates on the Drugs Free wing have access to extra channels.

Craft Workshops: This area was highlighted in our report of the year 2003 and it is with regret that we report that this facility is no longer available to our prison population due to the health and safety concerns i.e. lack of ventilation and also due to a reallocation of resources. Workshops are badly needed if this course of rehabilitative training is to continue. We look forward to the opening soon of a facility to train inmates in painting and decorating skills and also computer training for Inmates ECDL etc. Without these workshops life in the prison will be very boring for prisoners.

Medical: There were no doctors in this institution earlier this year due to industrial action and we wish to place on record our thanks to the medical staff of the prison who preformed so well under the circumstances. The professionalism and dedication of the medical staff in Pats shone through. The fact that the Mater Hospital is so near also ensured that no major problems arose. No dental facility exists in St. Patrick's but a fully equipped clinic is available in Mountjoy and is considered adequate for the demand.

Recreation:

Gym: A well-equipped gym exists and is run by a very professional dedicated and interested staff. The gym has not been open as often as it should have been this year because of re allocation of resources by management. We feel that an outlet for energy is a requirement for all prisoners in Pats and accordingly recommend it's full opening in the future.

Recreation Yards: A number of complaints have been received and investigated by this committee regarding sanctions imposed on prisoners following alleged transgressions in the various yards. In all cases after investigation the committee has upheld the decision of the governor as being correct. The main transgressions have related to contraband being thrown over the boundary wall from outside the prison and the prisoners attempting to retrieve them.

In February of this year a major incident arose when a number of prisoners made a protest and gained access to the netting and while on the netting were supplied with various forms of contraband by people outside the prison. These items were thrown up on the old net. We are relieved that no weapons were included in the bag thrown up. A total of nine inmates were involved and as a result of this protest provision was made for the erection of a new improved net. The net is also intended to prevent the arrival of drugs into the Institution. The net is in use a number of weeks and has proven itself to be a very good deterrent.

Playing of football is restricted in the yards to certain nominated days to allow all prisoners whether playing football or not to have access to the yard.

We also feel that CCTV facilities must be extended to the yards to assist the staff of St. Patrick's in dealing with problems in the yard. It will also ensure that real evidence of alleged transgressions in the yard are available.

Education:

We the committee of St Patrick's Institution continue to place education as our number one priority in our attempts to assist the inmates at this prison have a normal start on the outside after their sentence is completed. We feel we are very lucky with the staff attached to this particular programme and feel that our school is an excellent facility however it is just adequate for its purpose. However the teachers we have are very good. A number of our prisoners continue to study for the State Certificate Examinations and sit them in the prison each June. We were again very proud of their results.

Basic literacy continues to be a problem at St Patrick's and a substantial number of the inmates are unable to read or write and sadly their language skills are also very poor as their ability to even construct oral sentences is very poor. This issue is addressed by the literacy team of

the prison and also by the various volunteers who attend the prison. We must record our appreciation to the volunteers who come in on a regular basis to assist the inmates with literacy and classes are held each evening. We again wish to highlight the innovative action being taken to address the issue through the televisions in prisoners cells as previously outlined. We would also like to record our appreciation towards the staff in the library who are also making a huge contribution in the field of literacy.

We wish to state that we are delighted with the progress that has been made with renovations at the school and the fact that a number of classrooms have being improved. The Home Economics room in the school has been renovated to a high standard. We now wish to do the same with the Art's room.

We would like to congratulate the head teacher Tom Duffy on the excellent work he and his staff are doing.

Library:

Library is well stocked and is well used by the prisoners often as many as 30 inmates using the facility on any one occasion. However the library has been closed a few times due to manpower constraints. The visiting committee find the library facilities worthwhile and satisfactory. A number of events and talks are held throughout the year which inmates find very popular. Daily newspapers are also available to inmates in the library.

Visits: A liberal approach on the number of visits prisoners receive at this prison exists which we fully support. We feel the management is right to afford a second visit to parents etc. A change in the visiting arrangements occurred towards the end of this year. Each inmate nominates four visitors who can visit and all visitors must produce photo. Id at the visitors waiting room. Prisoners can change nominated visitors, as they want with the approval of the Governor.

Recreational Activities:

Members of the prison population are involved in various recreational activities and many groups from outside the prison used to come to compete against the prisoners in a variety of activities from chess to

football. This is no longer happening due to manpower cutbacks. We are saddened as we felt it was beneficial to all inmates. The proud tradition of chess in the prison is being lost.

D Division: The Drug Free Wing of St. Patrick's continues to be a success with a number of prisoners waiting to be accommodated on the wing. Prisoners are interviewed by a multi-disciplinary team. We fully endorse the programme and are pleased that it is so successful.

Inspector of Prisons Visit: The Chairman and two members of the committee met with the Inspector of Prisons Mr. Justice Kinlan on his invitation in late November. They spoke about issues of concern to the committee and answered all queries put to them regarding their dealings with prisoners and their observations. Two Human rights commissioners were also present and the committee also answered all their queries.

Issues of Concern:

Observation Cell: We feel that the existing cell is inhumane and welcome the new moves afoot to deal with this namely the provision of special observation cells.

Closure of Open Prisons and Fort Mitchell: We still feel that there is no longer an outlet for prisoners at this location who because of good behaviour, imminence of release etc should be transferred to an open location. We recommend the re-opening of locations closed as our Inmates are restricted to the locations they can be sent because St. Patrick's is a Juvenile Place of Detention for males aged 16-21years of age.

Connect Programme: We wish to reiterate what we said last year namely The committee is very concerned regarding the connect programme which is now unlikely to occur in St. Patrick's. We feel this programme is very important especially in light of the profile of our inmates. In this regard we now request that the programme be immediately commenced in St Patrick's.

Security of Prison: We as a committee raised the issue of shrubbery around the canal and effect it had on the effectiveness of CCTV at prison in last years report we are pleased to report that this has been removed. We thank the OPW and Waterways Ireland for their cooperation.

Assaults on Prisoners: A number of alleged assaults occurred in the prison involving prisoners. Members of An Garda Síochána investigated these. Allegations were also made against staff and these were investigated and found to be without foundation. We find a lot of prisoners complain about the length of time it takes for their allegations to be investigated.

Membership of the Committee: We are alarmed at the fact that members of this committee are not being replaced. We have a statutory responsibility towards the welfare of the prisoners and to ensure punishment's etc. are fair. It is putting pressure on the remaining members of the committee.

Conclusion

We are pleased to submit this report and feel St. Patrick's is very well run by a very professional Governor and Staff. Facilities are in need of some improvement but basic accommodation is good for what is a very old prison.

We support the establishment of a new purpose built prison to be built on a new green field site. However we feel it must have sufficient space to provide large open spaces to allow young male prisoners to release their energy. At least one full sized all weather football pitch is a basic requirement. Positive sentence management for Inmates is ongoing and we see it as very worthwhile as it is of great benefit on their release.

Finally the prison is always clean and a good work ethic is being instilled in the population.