

# Arbour Hill Visiting Committee Annual Report For Year Ending December 2004.

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The Minister For Justice, Equality & Law Reform,  
72/76 St Stephen's Green,  
Dublin 2.

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The Visiting Committee to Arbour Hill Prison have pleasure in submitting herein our Annual Report for year ending December 2004.

## **The Committee.**

The Committee met on the second Tuesday of each month, additional to our attendance at monthly meetings two members of the Committee visited the prison every month on an unscheduled basis. In the course of the year the term of office of six members of the Committee expired and we should like to avail of this opportunity to thank them for their contribution to the work of this Committee.

## **Summary.**

The Visiting Committee having exercised our duties diligently wish to state clearly that we found this unit of the Irish Prison Service to have been extremely well run during the past twelve months. Whilst the fabric of the buildings are relatively old and restrictive in size, the maximum utilisation is being achieved and in conditions of cleanliness, warmth and humane ambience. At the outset of this report we wish to comment most favourably on the 'man management' skills obviously being used by the Governor, Management and Staff in achieving an atmosphere of calm and productive harmony between inmates and staff. We believe it is very important to highlight this aspect as it is too easy to overlook the fact that approximately 50% of the inmates are non-sex offenders and that approximately 50% of the inmates are under the age of forty years and that 39% are serving tariffs of seven years or less. The common erroneous perception of Arbour Hill Prison, as reinforced by invariably inaccurate media portrayal is one of an institution for elderly sex offenders. Quite obviously this is grossly inaccurate and were this prison to be managed with a different ethos the atmosphere might well

be very different. We would wish that the actual prisoner profile be brought to the attention of the media as the present misconception is deleterious in respect of employment, housing, reintegration to family and society for prisoners on release.

The Visiting Committee would like to sincerely compliment the management and staff on their professionalism and compassion in creating and sustaining a caring ethos and friendly atmosphere in very challenging circumstances.

### **Recommendations.**

- ✘ *Arbour Hill's Psychiatric and Psychological Services be enhanced and extended and existing shortfall in Psychologists be addressed immediately.*
- ✘ *That a support service be provided to enhance the psychology service.*
- ✘ *That the actual prisoner profile be brought to the attention of the media as the present misconception is deleterious in respect of employment, housing, reintegration to family and society for prisoners on release.*
- ✘ *Active sentence management for sex offenders combined with structured release system for offenders who have successfully completed the relevant course(s).*
- ✘ *The development of a strategic policy document on the Treatment & Management of Sex Offenders.*
- ✘ *Sex Offenders Programme to be enlarged and fully supportive aftercare programme be established. Successful participation in this programme to be positively recognised in the course of sentence reviews and during considerations for the granting of early release or temporary release. At present participation in this programme does not give a prisoner any reduction in time to be served, consequently the uptake of places is disappointing.*

*We are strongly of the view that this issue will need to be addressed if we are to develop and expand our treatment programmes.*

- ✘ *Sentencing policy of all courts be the subject of a major review. If Judges were to adopt a more considered and proactive approach to sentencing it would contribute enormously to the motivation and progress of persons in the care of the prison service.*
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### ***Concerns.***

#### **Suicide & Self Harm.**

Notwithstanding that Arbour Hill Prison did not have a history of suicides and has a proactive policy on suicide awareness and prevention (*despite the Doctor not attending the previous four multidisciplinary suicide awareness meetings*) and that staff interact with and closely monitor inmates it is deeply regrettable, and indeed disturbing, that there were two suicides and one attempted suicide in the course of the past year. It is also disturbing the prison authorities deemed it appropriate to seek accommodation at the Central Mental Hospital for all three inmates concerned and that all three inmates had been transferred to the CMH and had been sent back to the prison after a short stay. Within days of their return two were dead and a third was saved only by the vigilance of prison staff. Whilst understanding medical confidentiality and the relevance of statutory enquiries we still feel that further elucidation is required!

#### **Comment.**

The committee are acutely aware of ongoing speculation in the media as to the future of this facility. Mindful of above observations it would be remiss of us not to express our sincerely held view that this prison is in many ways a model that should be carefully looked at in the context of future development of custodial facilities. The atmosphere, caring ethos, staff prisoner relationships, drug free status and capacity for sensitively handling the volatile and vulnerable are acquisitions that should not be dispensed with lightly. The use of this facility as a remand centre would almost entirely negate all of the above skills. While mindful of the need for economy of operation it is however important that other factors are not entirely overlooked in pursuit of same. It is difficult to define why Arbour Hill has

such a unique ethos and atmosphere, in reality its prisoner population is not that much different from other prisons, excepting of course that it is noncommittal and consequently it tends to have a stable population. One suspect that unit size, seniority of staff, prisoner balance and management approach are key factors.

 Requests/Complaints/Applications.

- In the course of the year a total of four prisoners came to see the Committee.
- ① One prisoner addressed the Committee on two occasions apropos his disagreement with the Doctor in relation to prescribed medication.  
*(Prisoner informed that this was outside the remit of the VC and that proscribing medication is entirely a matter for the medical professionals involved).*
- ② Prisoner complained that he had been waiting for months for treatment at a hospital outside of the prison? He further requested the assistance of the Committee in bringing forward the date for same.  
*(Following inquiries it emerged that the medical procedure referred to was entirely cosmetic in nature and would be available to the prisoner on his release from prison in a matter of a few months).*
- ③ Complained that he had not received a reply to his complaint to the Minister?  
*(Advised as to the procedure to be adhered to).*
- ④ Sought the assistance of the Committee in getting a transfer to an Open Centre and Temporary Release!  
*(As this prisoner had only weeks before been convicted of a second murder and for the second time been sentenced to life imprisonment, he was advised to engage with the therapeutic services and informed that prisoner transfers and temporary releases were not issues for the Visiting Committee).*

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**Arbour Hill Prison offers a wide range of facilities to its internees.**

**Health care.**

Health care is catered for by a range of services:

- ✘ 24 hour Medical Orderly/Nurse cover.
- ✘ A G.P. five days a week.
- ✘ A resident Psychologist\*
- ✘ A visiting Psychiatrist.<sup>+</sup>
- ✘ Dental care provided by Dublin Dental Hospital.
- ✘ Visiting Psychotherapist.
- ✘ Visiting Chiropodist.
- ✘ Optician as required.

<sup>+</sup> *The absence of a dedicated Psychiatrist remains a cause for concern and is pertinent to the 'Suicide issue' dealt with in greater detail elsewhere in this report..*

\* Further to concerns expressed in last years report we would again like to express our deep concern that in light of the many therapeutic courses undertaken at Arbour Hill Prison it is imperative that a second Psychologist be permanently assigned here. At present the resident Psychologist is by necessity primarily occupied in the delivery and co-ordination of therapeutic courses including the '*Sex Offenders Treatment Programme*'. Arbour Hill Prison has an approved allocation of two Psychologists. This allocation was intended to enable one Psychologist to be focused on individual and other non programme work while the other deals primarily with programme related work. As a consequence of this shortfall there is little opportunity for individual work and this remains a major cause for concern in a prison where a majority of the inmates are in acute need of therapeutic intervention. The Committee is of the view that this situation needs to be addressed as a matter of extreme urgency.

**Probation & Welfare.**

Arbour Hill has an allocation of two full time and one part time Probation & Welfare officers. Although a shortfall occurred during a transition period early in the year the prison now has an excellent service provided by a very dedicated team. The Probation & Welfare Service provide a wide range of

services including participation in the delivery of on site therapeutic courses and interaction with the families of prisoners.

### **Treatment Programmes.**

Arbour Hill currently offers the following therapy based programmes:

- ♦ *Thinking Skills Programme.*
- ♦ *Group Skills Programme.*
- ♦ *Sex Offenders Therapy Programme.*
- ♦ *'Lifers' Programme.*

Programmes are varied, well received and enthusiastically delivered. They are subject to constant revision and evaluation. All treatment programmes with the exception of the *Sex Offenders Treatment Programme* are delivered by multidisciplinary teams consisting of Teachers, Prison Staff and Probation & Welfare Officers under the supervision of the Psychology Service. The *Sex Offenders Treatment Programme* is delivered by a dedicated Psychologist assisted by Probation & Welfare staff. The Committee wish to record their admiration and support for the above programmes and urge that these initiatives be broadened and extended when resources permit.

### **Workshops, Training and the Industrial Area.**

The industrial area consists of Printing, Braille, Fabrics, Woodwork and Catering. These areas are a quite remarkable example of commitment, enthusiasm and dedication. The work output is most impressive. The industrial staff and the prisoners in their charge are to be complimented and we particularly welcome recent developments in getting certification for some of the prisoners in the various genres. The woodwork shop continues to provide the furnishing for Barrettstown Gang Camp and also designed and constructed the furnishing for part of the educational area at Cloverhill Prison. The Committee would like to take this opportunity to record their sincere appreciation to the prisoners and staff who gave so willingly of their talent, time and energy.

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We are pleased with the introduction of these courses within the various categories of woodwork, printing and the continuing training in catering.

### **Educational Facilities/Services.**

The Education Unit in the prison continues to provide an excellent service to offenders. A wide range of subject/courses were available at various levels from basic literacy to degree level through the Open University. Educational activities at Arbour Hill Prison involves approx. 80% of the prison population throughout the school year. This high level of interest and attendance by offenders is indicative of the commitment and enthusiasm of the prison's teaching staff. Additionally the teaching staff continue to participate in the delivery of the therapeutic courses and other extra curricular activities.

### **The Kitchen:**

During the past year the kitchen moved from the provision of a fourteen day menu rotation to a twenty eight day menu rotation. We welcome the focus on responding to the dietary needs of oriental and other non national prisoners. Rice is provided as an alternative to potatoes, additionally special provisions are made to cater for 'religious' requirements for the Muslim inmates. While a number of prisoners are undergoing the 'Leanardo' course under the auspices of CERT it is regrettable that the physical dimensions of the kitchen do not allow for the greater use of this area in the context of more demanding and certifiable long term courses. Notwithstanding the above the operating standards in the care and presentation of food continues to be more than compatible to any modern canteen or hotel kitchen. We continue to be impressed by the standard, variety and quality of food prepared and served within the prison.

### **Spiritual Care.**

The prison is served by a full time Catholic Chaplain and a number of visiting Chaplains of other denominations. Interaction with the other support services plays a large part in what could be described as a high profile approach to the spiritual care and well being of the prison population.

### **Cladded Cells.**

Arbour Hill has only one Cladded cell which is never used in a security context. Sixteen prisoners were placed in this facility during the past 12 months: seven at their own request, seven for medical reasons and two for their own protection.

The Committee are of the view that the use of such a facility tends to be misconstrued in the media and consequently misunderstood by the general public. Recognising that the Irish Prison Service has taken a policy decision to replace these facilities with '*close observation rooms*' we would however be concerned that existing facilities remain operative until then.

**Waste Management.**

Prison management view further progress on this issue as a priority in the immediate future. Notwithstanding that future policy on this issue is likely to be centrally driven local administration continues to formulate and develop an interim policy on waste reduction. Last year's reductions of approximately 50% of land fill output has been maintained and a complete survey of '*potential issues*' has just been completed as the basis for a more complete response to an ongoing problem. Arrangements are underway for the initial implementation of the Prison Service's *Waste Management Strategy*.

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We would also like to record our appreciation to the many individuals and voluntary organisations who, in the course of the year provided support and assistance to prisoners and management alike.

In conclusion we wish to sincerely thank the Governor and his staff for their courtesy and helpfulness to us during the year.

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**Tom Flemming. (Chairman).**

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**Ita Greene.**

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**John Sheehy.**

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**John Murphy.**

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**Seamus Quinn.**

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**Eithne Killeen.**

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**Geoff Levis.**

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**Jim O’Hanrahan.**

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**Rita Hayes.**

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**William Foley**

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