

Annual Report 2019

Dochas Centre Visiting Committee

Mountjoy Prison Campus

**2019 Annual Report
Dochas Visiting Committee
Dochas Centre
North Circular Road
Dublin 7**

The Minister for Justice & Equality
Charlie Flanagan TD
Department of Justice & Equality
Montague Court
7 – 11 Montague Street
D02 FT96

Dochas Visiting Committee
Dochas Centre
North Circular Road
Dublin 7

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Dochas Centre Visiting Committee, I have the pleasure of submitting for your consideration the Annual Report for 2019. In carrying out our duties it has been our privilege to work with the women in the Dochas Centre.

There are three members on the Visiting Committee 2019 and it is my first duty to thank my colleagues for their work during the past year.

We welcome Governor Ray Murtagh, Assistant Governor Eileen Horgan and Chief Officer Jonathan Higgins who joined the staff during the year. We are very confident that their leadership style will see very positive changes during the coming years.

We wish to record with sympathy the death in July 2019 of our colleague Noel Cloake rip.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Christine Ryan

Ms Christine Ryan
Chairperson
Dochas Centre Visiting Committee

Committee meetings:

The VC meet on the last Thursday of every month. Members of the Committee made many unannounced visits during the year.

Challenges:

We are aware of the great efforts made by Probation Officers to seek suitable accommodation for prisoners about to be released. However, this often tends to be short term emergency accommodation and is not addressing the larger issue of what happens to these women afterwards. We suggest that the responsibility for this issue be taken at a higher level as a matter of urgency. We look forward to improved measures in this area.

Communication:

Mail to and from the Dochas Centre is an ongoing problem and we continued to receive complaints about this throughout 2019.

Family members have complained that they have difficulty getting through to book visits and we are concerned that there is a delay in resolving this situation. It is vitally important to the wellbeing of the women and their children that visits take place regularly.

Chaplaincy:

We would like to acknowledge the work of the religious Sisters in the Chaplaincy Service for those who wish to avail of it. They provide Spiritual and Pastoral care. Their comforting support can be crucial to many women facing the challenges of prison life, personal crisis such as family bereavement, illness, family worries and disappointments. They are an invaluable connection with the women, particularly for those women who have no family outside the prison, both Irish and Foreign Nationals.

Health & Safety:

We met with ACO Dave Miller and found that fire equipment was up to standard and in full working condition. Fire drills are carried out at regular intervals. We also inspected all written records regarding same.

Library:

The Library is a fully stocked resource which provides a quiet space to those who would benefit from it.

Reception:

The reception area where incoming women are processed was clean each time we visited. This area which is a woman's first contact with the Centre is well kept and has a good store of clothing for women who are in need.

Mother & Baby Unit:

The unit is fully equipped. We observed Officers who were very responsive to ensuring that the specific needs of mothers and babies are fully met. While we suggest that the imprisonment of

mothers with young babies is not ideal under any circumstances and feel strongly that non-custodial sentences should be the norm in this case, we are pleased that the Dochas Centre has attempted to facilitate mothers in keeping infants with them up to the age of 12 months.

Tuck Shop:

The issue of the Tuck Shop is ongoing. Prices are prohibitive and we received many complaints from prisoners in relation to this throughout 2019. It appears to the Visiting Committee that some very basic items are in fact comparatively overpriced and costs have become unaffordable for some of the women. There were some complaints with regard to the products available and healthier options were suggested. It was noted that there was a need for improvement in products such as toiletries, and make up etc.

Drugs:

The issue of illegal substances continues to be a problem. There have been a number of incidents where women have brought in drugs on return from Temporary Release. Unfortunately these were passed onto other women in the Centre which resulted in women becoming ill, having seizures and on occasion being hospitalised. This continues to be a major cause of concern to the Governor and staff and appears to be on the increase.

Education:

We are very pleased with the Education Programme in Dochas, the schools many courses offer choice to the prisoners education, such as Fetac, Junior and Leaving Certificate. Some participated in on-line professional courses, e.g. Accountancy. The partnership with the Red Cross is a success and partnerships with other agencies would be a benefit. The schools attendance rate is currently under review.

Healthcare:

The Healthcare Centre is very well run, with efficient, committed and dedicated staff. The systems in place to administer drugs on a daily basis as required are excellent. The Dochas Centre provides a Primary Care service, comprising of a Medical Team, a GP and Nurses. It provides referrals to hospital and other services, including Mental Health, Psychology and Dental. The Psychology Service within the Dochas Centre engages with families on a varied range of mental health needs.

Overcrowding:

Given the increase in the imprisonment of women in recent years, overcrowding continues to have a serious impact on the regime in the Dochas Centre. Regrettably we encountered overcrowding throughout our visits in 2019. This issue has been raised by the Visiting Committee's in previous Annual Reports. This is of concern to the Governor and staff who are charged with managing the numbers.

Kitchen & Canteen:

The cookers, shelving, worktops, floors, walls and utensils have invariably been impeccably clean. Stores were in very good order and all prepacked goods were in date. The VC found the food to be plentiful and adequate. They are also continuing to provide work/training facilities to women in the

Dochas Centre. When we visited the kitchen during 2018 we found the staff and the women working there very professional in their work ethics. The food we tasted was excellent.

Conclusion:

We would like to thank and acknowledge the contribution of all the different agencies who give their time and services on a daily/weekly basis to the benefit of the Dochas Centre.

The Committee has exercised its duties diligently and is committed to exercising them in full in 2020.

In June we marked the retirement of Governor Mary O Connor and acknowledge her courtesy and assistance to us at all times. We wish her well in the future.

The Visiting Committee thank the Governor's, Chief's, ACO's and staff for their help and courtesy during 2019 and we look forward to continuing our work with them in 2020.

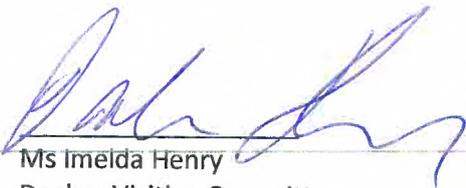
We the Committee finally wish to thank you Minister and trust we have been of service during the year and continue to be of service.



Ms Christine Ryan
Chairperson
Dochas Visiting Committee



Ms Anne Confrey
Dochas Visiting Committee



Ms Imelda Henry
Dochas Visiting Committee