

Marc Mac Sharry TD

1

[REDACTED]
Prison Officers Association
18 Merrion Square
Dublin 2



21 January 2019.

Via email.

[REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of January 21st at 09:50 and your previous Facebook messages of Friday January 18th at 22:14pm and January 19th at 04:07am which were all similar in content.

As I said to you in my first reply of January 18th at 23:30pm on Facebook and again on January 19th at 12:24pm you may have viewed the audio of the entire meeting but the conclusions you draw prove that you were simply not listening.

For the record, and for the third time in writing let me again categorically state to you and anyone in the higher echelons of the Prison Officers Association who doesn't seem to get it (as so many of the ordinary members of the POA who have contacted me with messages of support do) that I have no issue with the provision of hot meals to hard working prison staff and contractors. I have no issue with the subsidisation of such services in line with formal agreements with the state. Indeed from a personal perspective I would suggest given the extraordinary difficult work in question and the stressful environment perhaps there is a case for such services to be free of charge. For anyone to attempt to imply that my contribution was an attempt to undermine services to ordinary members then it is a fabrication of their own making. My sole interest and responsibility as a member of the PAC under the constitution is to ensure value for money and accountability and audit in the public interest.

You suggest that because of my asking 'where the money goes?' that the IPS will seek to remove Prison Staff canteen facilities and access to hot meals. Why would they do that? As I said in writing to you already should the IPS seek to do any such thing you can be certain of my relentless opposition to such a retrograde step and my support for you and your organisation in resisting it. There can be no grounds for such a move based on my contribution last week.

When questions are raised relevant to my work as a member of the PAC I have a duty of care to ask them. What seems clear from my questioning the other day is: The IPS do not know who audits Mess Committees, They do not know if Accounts are produced, they do not know where any excess money goes. They simply know that Mess Committees exist and each have their own Bank Account, supposed to be run on a 'not for profit basis' and that all transactions are in cash. They are supposed to pay for all food stuffs and ingredients required. We were told staff and prisoner trainees were covered by the subvention. That is all they could answer on this matter. The Comptroller and Auditor General agreed that it should be looked at against a backdrop of what happened at the Garda College in Templemore as no doubt you heard from the audio.



In the absence of actual data being provided by the IPS I had to rely on my questioning to try to develop an understanding of the situation. I asked Mr Culleton to loosely estimate the number of Prison Staff on site across the 9 Prisons with Mess Committees operated in this way on a 7 day 365 basis. 940 was struck as a rough estimate. The figure for the cost of feeding someone per day came from the Director General at €5.56 per day. The expected spend was pitched by me at €10 per head per day some €0.61 less than the estimate in the Unions Circular in 2012 some 7 years before. (Copy Attached)

So for the purposes of trying to understand the position I multiplied $940 \times 5.56 \times 365 = \text{€}1,907,636$ as costs to feed all people and if all 940 plus teachers, contractors, Drug Councillors, and Doctors across the 9 mess committee areas each spent €10 then that's $940 \times 10 \times 365 = \text{€}3,431,000$ turnover. Granted this depends on an average of 940 spending €10 per day but if that was the case bearing in mind all staff costs are covered that means that a cumulative profit across all 9 mess committees of up to €1,523,364. If the average spend was say €7.50 then the profit would be € 665,614, or €6 it would be €150,964 and so on. The situation is further complicated by issues that were raised with me by many sources that some or all Mess Committees routinely draw on stores intended for prisoners. The fact that the people in charge of the Prison service and the Department of Justice could not answer some basic questions in terms of the status of mess committees in terms of what Governance exists and were unaware of any audit or where any excesses went is a matter of huge concern. The point here is not the provision of canteen facilities, hot food or anything of the sort. The point is where does the money paid by your members for the self-same food go and I am sure your members would be most interested to know. Wouldn't you? At the very least it seems possible that there is a cumulative excess that your members are entitled to be aware of. The attached memo from the Union in 2012 says such excesses would be available 'solely' to the 'benefit of local members' in the relevant prison.

As I said to you in writing before perhaps all Mess Committees are the picture of compliance, governance, good procedures and audit and God knows I hope they are. Just maybe some are not. Good Governance, proper procedure, auditing and accounting are paramount. If they are not in place then they need to be put in place. Simple as that.

If the IPS seek in any way to undermine the provision of hot meals and appropriate facilities to any prison staff I would like to be immediately informed so that I can help lead the fight against it. They have no grounds to do so following my questioning last week and for you to suggest it provides them with such is simply wrong.

To conclude let me remind you that at the same meeting I also raised the issue of illegal surveillance of your members, missing property, vehicles, the private catering of parties at the states expense, bullying, harassment, sexual assault and promotion blocking. All matters which I am certain are priorities for your members and the Union though you didn't mention any of those concerns. I will do all I can to progress all of these matters in the coming months.

Finally I would like to assure you that as a public representative the POA can as before count on my support and commitment to the improvement of working conditions and remuneration for all members as and when required.

Yours sincerely

Marc Mac Sharry TD

Marc Mac Sharry TD



Dáil Éireann, Leinster House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2. ☎ 01 618 4221 📠 01 618 4357
 Knockaderry House, Stephen Street, Sligo. ☎ 071 91 43616
 ✉ marc.macsharry@oireachtas.ie 📞 086 267 4764
 📱 /marc.maesharry 📧 @MarcMacSharry

