

Annual Report of the Interagency Group for a Fairer, Safer Ireland

2022

June 2023

Dear Minister McEntee,

I am pleased to submit to you the 2022 Annual Report of the Interagency Group for a Fairer, Safer Ireland (IAG).

The main purpose of the Group is to implement two key recommendations of the Penal Policy Review Group Report (*July 2014 Report of the Strategic Review of Penal Policy*, <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/405a6-penal-policy-review/>), which call for much greater cross-Government cooperation in the management and rehabilitation of offenders and crime prevention in general.

The work of the IAG in 2022 was carried out in the context of local change and global instability. As Ireland emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, a return to pre-2020 operations presented a challenge for the Courts Service, Health Service Executive (HSE) and Irish Prison Service (IPS). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 compelled a whole-of-Government approach to an emergency response, with human and capital resources necessarily diverted to that end. The Department of Education, the Department of Housing, the Department of Justice and the Department of Social Protection, among others, have adapted to confront the ensuing humanitarian crisis.

Against this backdrop, progress continued during 2022 to improve access by offenders to the public services they need on release to increase the likelihood of desistance, and the Group contributed to various important initiatives which have required interagency cooperation throughout the year.

In accordance with Goal 3 of the Department of Justice's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023, which includes an emphasis on reducing reoffending, the IAG used its own mandate to join with relevant Government Departments and Agencies to facilitate and support research on recidivism. The resulting piece of work, *Understanding reoffending: Push factors and preventative responses*, was published in November 2022.

As a next research focus, the Department of Justice, the Probation Service and other key stakeholders have identified the need for an up-to-date study on homelessness amongst those coming into contact with the Irish criminal justice system. Ultimately, this seeks to inform policy responses to address the significant homelessness and accommodation challenges evident among people in the criminal justice system, empowering them to make choices that assist reintegration and open doors to leading rewarding lives in their communities.

The Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO) continued their positive work with the prison population and people who offend in the community, coordinating with IPS, HSE and the Department of Social Protection among others in this regard, as well as providing a link to initiatives such as Housing First. In terms of the latter, its criminal justice strand recognises that involvement in the criminal justice system typically adds to the challenges

already experienced by this cohort in their efforts to obtain services, including access to accommodation. The Housing First Implementation Plan 2022-2026 commits to building on a successful pilot in the Dublin region by expanding the scheme nationally. Both IASIO and Housing First were among the presenters to the IAG in 2022.

More generally, Government approved the *Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024* in August 2022. The Review formally acknowledged that the work of the IAG over the past four years has been instrumental in achieving progress in the areas of access to health and social services post-release for prisoners, adding that more can be done. It is in this spirit and with this call in mind that we aim to fulfil our mission in 2023 and beyond.

I would like to thank the members of the Group for their commitment to improving interagency cooperation in relation to offenders and penal policy, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues in Government.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John O'Callaghan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John O'Callaghan, Deputy Secretary, Department of Justice
Chair
June 2023

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1. Context

1.1 Background to the establishment of the Interagency Group

The Penal Policy Review Group (PPRG) conducted a wide-ranging strategic review of penal policy, taking into account relevant work already carried out in this jurisdiction and elsewhere, the rights of those convicted of crimes, the perspective of those who are victims of crime, and the interests of society in general.

The PPRG advocated an approach to crime and the penal system which emphasised rehabilitation and advocated for an improved penal system, the reduction of reliance on imprisonment as a sanction, and an increased focus on alternatives to prison. A strong thread running through all of its recommendations is the need to see the wider social context of offending, and to ensure that the work of the criminal justice agencies is integrated with social services, broadly conceived.

The Government endorsed the Penal Policy Review Group recommendations in 2014.

The two key recommendations of the Review Group Report relevant to the work of the Interagency Group are recommendations 3 and 41 below. These recommendations promote interagency and interdepartmental cooperation, on the basis that crime is a matter of social as well as penal policy.

Recommendation 3

The Review Group recommends that there must be greater emphasis, if necessary through legislation, on promoting inter-agency cooperation in the management and rehabilitation of offenders. In addition to the criminal justice agencies, there is a need to recognise that a whole-of Government approach is required in collaboration with relevant agencies and local authorities in addressing offending behaviour and assisting offenders in maintaining crime free lives.

Recommendation 41

The Review Group recognises that crime is a question of social as well as penal policy and recommends that all Government Departments and agencies consider the question of crime prevention when formulating policy. In this regard, the Review Group recommends that the Department of Justice and Equality join with all Government Departments and agencies to facilitate and support research in order to assist in the formulation of penal policy.

1.2 Rationale for the establishment of the Interagency Group

The rationale for the Interagency Group is that crime is a challenge for all of society and requires a whole-of-society response. Crime is associated with many social problems such as economic deprivation, unemployment, low levels of educational achievement and substance misuse. Society suffers as a result of crime and everyone has an interest in preventing crime; it is not just the responsibility of criminal justice agencies.

The socio-economic factors which may be involved when someone goes to jail are the same factors which need to be addressed when he or she comes out of prison. That is to say, many people convicted of criminal offences have similar characteristics and challenges which have contributed to their offending, and issues that are likely to inhibit them from leading lives free of crime and increase the risk of reoffending.

For example, a significant percentage of those in prison or on probation are low income, unemployed, with low levels of educational attainment, and many are relatively young men, often with histories of substance misuse. Marginalised groups including homeless people, those with mental illness and members of the Traveller community are also considerably over-represented in the prison and probation populations.

The number of committals to prison – both prisoners on remand and those who have been sentenced – demonstrates the scale of the challenge to public bodies of facilitating successful reintegration of prisoners into society and reducing recidivism. The table below, provided by the Irish Prison Service, shows the size of the prison population and the through-put of the prison system in recent years. The figure for 2021 showed that there were over 2,500 fewer committals compared with 2019, an acceleration of a dramatic reduction visible almost year-on-year. This sheer scale of this reduction between 2019 and 2021 may have been exaggerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated delays in prosecutions and in the courts, as 2022 saw the number increase by almost 1,000.

Overall, the trend demonstrated in the table below since 2012 is of a significant fall in the number of people committed to prison. It is notable, however, that in recent years the total number of prisoners released was less than those committed. If the number of committals to prison returns to a more normal pattern, the trend of more committals than releases raises concerns about a possible return to overcrowding in prisons and the possibility of prisoners being released at short notice without the agreed protocols being followed.

TOTAL COMMITTALS INTO AND RELEASES FROM PRISONS

Year	Total Committals	Total Releases
2022	7,055	6,450
2021	6,133	6,075
2020	6,340	6,682
2019	8,939	8,656
2018	8,071	7,811
2017	9,287	9,313
2016	15,099	15,205
2015	17,206	17,403
2014	16,155	16,662
2013	15,735	15,905
2012	17,026	17,052

Source: Irish Prison Service

DAILY AVERAGE NUMBER OF PRISONERS IN CUSTODY

The table below provides figures in relation to the daily average number of prisoners in custody over recent years. The overall daily average number of prisoners in custody in 2022 was 4,095, compared to 3,794 in 2021, an increase of 7.9%. The average number of female offenders in custody was 129, an 11% decrease on the 2021 average of 145.

It is to be noted that the 2020 and 2021 figures represent a significant decrease on the 2019 figures due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Year	Average Daily Population
2022	4,095*
2021	3,794
2020	3,824
2019	3,971
2018	3,893
2017	3,680
2016	3,718

2015	3,722
2014	3,915
2013	4,158
2012	4,318

* Provisional data pending publication of Irish Prison Service’s Annual Report 2022

OFFENDERS SUPERVISED BY THE PROBATION SERVICE

The figures for offenders supervised by the Probation Service show a trend of increasing numbers in recent years, with a significant reduction in the number of people referred from courts in 2020/2021 associated with the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figures for 2022 will be provided in the Probation Service’s Annual Report 2022.

Year	Total offenders dealt with in year*	Total offenders referred from courts
2021	15,448	7,277
2020	15,537	6,059
2019	16,607	9,009
2018	15,777	8,105
2017	15,269	7,799

* This includes offenders being dealt with at the beginning of the year in addition to new referrals made during the year.

REOFFENDING DATA

An Evidence Review of Recidivism and Policy Responses (Ian O’Donnell, 2020), published by the Department of Justice in 2020, provided a valuable exploration of the insights that reoffending studies can offer for evidence-based policy making. Detailed information about the population of offenders is contained in the CSO’s studies of recidivism or reoffending. The studies report on:

- Prison Reoffending Statistics, which provides information on recorded reoffending by people who were released from a custodial prison sentence from 2015 to 2018, and
- Probation Reoffending Statistics, which provides information on the level of recorded reoffending by individuals placed under the management of the Probation Service.

The latest study primarily relates to individuals who were referred to the Probation Service in 2017.

The findings from these are set out below.

It should be noted that the CSO Probation and Prison Reoffending publications were developed separately. While they are broadly similar, there are differences. For example, convictions must be secured within 24 months of the date that the crime incident was reported to be included in the calculation of the Probation Reoffending rate; no such requirement exists with respect to the calculation of the Prison Reoffending rate. Also, the exact list of exclusions can differ between the publications, and due to the differences it is not possible to make direct comparisons.

PRISONER REOFFENDING STATISTICS

Prison reoffending estimates are calculated using data provided by the Irish Prison Service and An Garda Síochána's PULSE reporting system. This publication introduced greater coverage in analysis of prisoner reoffending in Ireland by including additional reoffending incidents related to court-convicted Road and Traffic incidents (RTIs) that have previously been excluded from the methodology.

Of prisoners released from custody in 2015, 62% were linked to a reoffending incident within three years of their release. The data also indicate that younger age groups of released prisoners are much more likely to reoffend, with over four out of five (84 %) of individuals released from custodial sentences and aged less than 21 at the time of entering prison reoffending within three years of release. In contrast, just over one quarter (27%) of individuals who were over 50 years old reoffended within three years of release.

Reoffending continues to decrease over time, whether one looks at three-year or one-year windows for reoffending following release from custody. A little under half (47.5%) of individuals released in 2017 reoffended within one year of release, compared to the 54% of individuals released in 2011 who reoffended within one year of release.

There is a small difference in reoffending rates between males and females. Although the vast majority of released prisoners in 2015 were male (93%), slightly more females reoffended within three years (66%) than males (61%).

PROBATION REOFFENDING STATISTICS

The CSO Reoffending Statistics report includes all persons subject to an order supervised in the community. It tracks their offending behaviour over one, two and three years following their sentencing or release. In order to include all possible convictions, a further two years is allowed to complete any Court proceedings.

The Probation Reoffending study reported that over 70% of persons supervised by the Probation Service did not reoffend within one year of their order being made. Probation reoffending rates are remaining relatively static over time.

In the most recent cohort for which a three-year reoffending rate is available (2015), almost half (49%) of individuals committed at least one reoffence for which they received a conviction. Males (28%) remained marginally more likely to reoffend than females (27%) within one year of entering probation in 2017. The report shows variations depending on whether the individual was sentenced to a Community Service Order, a Probation Order or Post Custody Supervision. Overall, those sentenced to a Community Service Order were less likely to reoffend within one year than those sentenced to a Probation Order. Persons subject to post release supervision had the lowest level of reoffending.

There is an inverse relationship between age and reoffending rates. Individuals who are subject to probation supervision tend to reoffend less when they are older, with just 8% of over 65s reoffending within a year of receiving probation. In contrast, 42% of under 18s who were subject to probation supervision in 2017 reoffended within a year.

In 2017, the highest number of probation orders were issued to individuals who committed offences categorised as Theft and related offences (971 persons). This category contained the 3rd highest one year reoffending rate with 35% of individuals (344) reoffending. Offences related to Public Order and other social code offences had the highest level of 1-year reoffending with 38% of individuals (203 in total) reoffending within a year.

The report on the 2016 cohort included a classification of whether a Probation reoffender received a custodial or non-custodial sanction for their reoffence. This classification provides a useful indication of the degree of escalation and de-escalation of the reoffending Court sanctions that the Probation reoffenders receive. Of those persons who did reoffend within one year in 2016 (31.1%), over 49% received a non-custodial penalty.

The improvements in reoffending rates over time appear to reflect developments in Probation Service supervision. Reoffending by persons subject to post-custody supervision is encouragingly low and suggests that supervision in the community after release does support positive resettlement and reduces harmful behaviour.

In presentations to the Interagency Group, CSO representatives have drawn attention to the limitations of their reports on recidivism. The absence of a shared identification system in the criminal justice system makes it time-consuming and resource-intensive to track individuals from the Pulse system used by An Garda Síochána, through the Courts Service and, on conviction, to the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. It is not possible to track an estimated 5 per cent of offenders.

Limited information is collected about the profile of those who reoffend or those who do not reoffend. As part of its data holdings, the CSO has access to and use of other administrative datasets such as those of the Department of Social Protection, Revenue, Education and other agencies and Departments. It also has access to mortality data from the General Registry Office, the Geo-directory and Census data.

Other information which would be useful in predicting the risk of recidivism before or at the time of incarceration include age at first offence, prior arrests, family status, health status and education level. The addition of these variables could be used to enrich the existing prison and probation datasets to provide a better understanding of the factors that predispose offenders to reoffend or, conversely, to lead a crime-free life. They would also draw attention to the cross-Government nature of the responses needed to reduce recidivism and crime.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

People who have offended can experience resistance, delays and even rejection in trying to access mainstream services. As a result, from a very practical point of view, their level of risk of reoffending can be unwittingly increased. Clearly, criminal justice services - prison and probation - have a responsibility to do what they can to facilitate reintegration, by virtue of their specific roles, responsibilities, experience, and expertise. However, they can only go so far: to address some of the issues that have a significant impact on the risk of reoffending - e.g. homelessness, unemployment, addiction, and mental illness - the cooperation of the relevant Government Departments and agencies is required.

Therefore, there is a clear need to have joined-up services, including improved information sharing and operational cooperation to achieve optimal impact on reducing offending and victimisation in our communities. It is also important to recognise that prisoners retain rights and entitlements to public services despite being in prison custody, that they have only lost the right to liberty. We need to ask what is being done to ensure that prisoners, like all other citizens, have access to public services and what can be done to reduce the barriers that exist.

A key role played by the Interagency Group is to raise awareness among its members from Government Departments and agencies of the implications of policy and services on the reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders and the prevention of crime and of the need to adapt or coordinate those policies/services to facilitate reintegration and reduce recidivism.

2. Working Methods

2.1 Representation on the Interagency Group

The Interagency Group consists of representatives of the main Departments and Agencies with responsibilities for the management and rehabilitation of offenders. The membership of the Interagency Group in 2022 is included at Appendix A.

2.2 Meetings

In 2022, the Group met four times on the following dates: 23 March, 08 June, 14 September and 07 December. All meetings were held via Zoom. In total, to the end of 2022, the Group has held 26 meetings. A table of those Departments/Agencies in attendance at the 2022 meetings is attached at Appendix B.

2.3 Terms of Reference

The following are the terms of reference of the Group:

The mission of the Interagency Group for a Fairer, Safer Ireland is to improve interdepartmental and interagency coordination in the integration and rehabilitation of offenders and the prevention of crime as recommended by the Report of the Penal Policy Strategic Review Group.

To this end, the Interagency Group will:

1. Review existing pathways that involve interagency coordination and cooperation to improve the integration and rehabilitation of offenders;
2. Based on this review, propose improved interagency coordination arrangements for the integration and rehabilitation of offenders;
3. Promote pro-social behaviour by offenders, to those most at risk of offending and anti-social behaviour, which results in positive participation in society;
4. Recommend how the consideration of crime prevention could be incorporated in the formulation and implementation of public sector penal and social policies;
5. Consider how fairness and greater equality could be achieved in the areas of penal and social policy in relation to crime prevention issues;
6. Identify where research and data collation could assist in greater integration across the Public Service in terms of the rehabilitation of offenders and the formulation and impact of penal policy.

3. Work Programme 2022

The work programme for 2022, agreed by the Interagency Group and linked to the Group's terms of reference, is set out below.

1. Review existing pathways that involve interagency coordination and cooperation to improve the integration and rehabilitation of offenders.

In 2022, the Group will continue to identify where interagency cooperation can improve the effectiveness of the pathways for the integration and rehabilitation of offenders. It will facilitate agreement among the agencies involved through reviews of successful interagency initiatives and proposed initiatives and, through discussion and analysis, encourage alignment of policy and service objectives.

The Group will continue to focus on encouraging solutions to blockages in existing pathways and agree new pathways among the relevant agencies which improve the integration and rehabilitation of offenders.

2. Based on this review, propose improved interagency coordination arrangements for the integration and rehabilitation of offenders.

The work of the Group to date suggests that interagency cooperation could be enhanced to ensure that offenders, on release from prison, have an identity for the purposes of accessing relevant and needed public services, have better access to accommodation, to medical care for on-going conditions, particularly continuity of care regarding mental health issues and to training/employment opportunities. The Group will recommend steps that could be taken to improve access to these services.

The Group aims to specifically focus on access to the public services card in order to ensure that all prisoners can access related public services on their release from prison. The Group also aims to focus on employment related issues such as job seekers protocol, disability benefit and employment opportunities.

The Group also aims to continue to focus on the issue of medical cards to eligible offenders on release from prison. This includes the monitoring of procedures currently in place in the IPS with a view to improving procedures for applying pre-release and maintaining access to medical cards post release for eligible prisoners.

3. Promote pro-social behaviour, which results in a positive participation in society.

The Interagency Group has noted the success of the Community Return Programme in promoting better pro-social behaviour among prisoners before release from prison and their positive participation in society after release.

The Group will examine initiatives involving interagency cooperation in other jurisdictions, which could improve social behaviour and the positive participation of offenders in society and make recommendations where appropriate.

4. Recommend how the consideration of crime prevention could be incorporated in the formulation and implementation of public sector penal and social policies.

The Group will examine ways in which cross-sectoral issues are handled nationally and in other jurisdictions to identify an effective model for incorporating crime prevention in the formulation and implementation of penal and social policies and make recommendations accordingly.

Based on the evidence of the importance of family life to the reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders, the Group will continue to focus on strengthening and maintaining family links for prisoners. The Group will pay particular attention to how interagency cooperation could strengthen offenders' engagement in family life, both in prison and on release.

5. Consider how fairness and greater equality could be achieved in the areas of penal and social policy in relation to crime prevention issues.

The Group will review existing policies and practices in crime prevention from the perspective of fairness and equality and identify where interagency cooperation could achieve greater fairness and equality in crime prevention.

The Group will focus on accommodation related issues and their importance to fairness, equality and crime prevention. This includes focussing on implementation of a housing protocol between relevant services including the IPS, monitoring and contributing to Housing First Policy which is being developed and which aims to provide housing and provision of wrap around services support services for prisoners with special needs on release.

The Group will continue to monitor and engage with relevant services regarding continuity of medical care pre and post release, particularly in relation to those suffering from mental illness.

6. Identify where research and data collation could assist in greater integration across the Public Service in terms of the rehabilitation of offenders and the formulation and impact of penal policy.

The Group will continue to review existing research and data on the rehabilitation of offenders and the formulation and impact of penal policy and recommend where, from an interagency perspective, further research and data are required to underpin policy and to monitor implementation of service initiatives in the rehabilitation of offenders and the impact of penal policy.

The Group specifically aims to examine the following areas in detail, recidivism studies, crime prevention and reduction programmes and longitudinal studies of offenders post release with a view to collaborate with the Department of Justice in respect of their Data and Research Strategy and including proposals from the Group in the Departments call for research proposals.

4. Report for 2022

4.1 Issues dealt with by the Group

Education

In March 2022, Shauna Dunlop of SOLAS presented to the Group on the topic of 'Building Bridges', a Further Education and Training (FET) project for those in custody.

Building Bridges 2021-2024 is a joint national project led by the Irish Prison Service and SOLAS, sponsored by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. It seeks to build on the well-established infrastructure already in place between the Education and Training Boards and the Irish Prison Service to both expand and improve on outcomes for learners.

This project will be a strand of the national *FET Strategy 2020-2024: Transforming Learning Future FET*, within the themes of skills, inclusion and pathways. It will also take account of other relevant national policy and initiatives where complementarity exists.

The overall purpose of the project is to improve outcomes for learners who engage with Further Education and Training while in custody or through transition from custody, and to raise awareness of available pathways and options in FET.

The core principles of Building Bridges are:

1. Building awareness of FET (to include all skills and training options);
2. Strengthening and increasing pathways to further education options;
3. Inclusive and integrated approach, including for FET (and HE);
4. Consistent equality of opportunity to address the needs of students with specific learning needs;
5. Synergy with all connected national strategies and policies; and
6. Improved quality of provision in prison education and progression, measured by outcomes.

Housing

Rob Lowth, National Director for the Office of Housing First, presented to the Group in March 2022.

Housing First is a cross-Government programme involving the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Department of Health; the Health Service Executive; the Department of Justice; and Local Authorities. The project was mainstreamed in 2014, following a successful three-year pilot in Dublin City Centre.

The initial target of 100 tenancies was increased to 300 under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan of 2016, and the Housing First National Implementation Plan (2018) put the programme

on a national footing. The overall target of 663 tenancies was achieved by December 2021. As of January 2022, 687 tenancies had been delivered.

Housing First is delivered on a regional basis by Local Authorities and the HSE, with tendered contracts awarded to Specialist NGO providers. The Dublin Housing First Service retendered in 2019 and was awarded to Peter McVerry Trust, with a complementary Street Outreach Service awarded to Dublin Simon Community. A Criminal Justice Strand pilot in partnership with the Department of Justice, the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service was integrated into Dublin Housing First Service in October 2020.

Under the Housing First Implementation Plan 2022-2026, 1,319 new tenancies are targeted. Targets differ regionally according to need and demand – the target for Dublin is the highest, followed by the Southeast and Southwest. The Implementation Plan also commits to extending outreach and intensive engagement to all regions, while the Criminal Justice strand will also be expanded. Work will be done to enhance and improve health supports, and continual monitoring of the project's performance – including a fidelity review in 2023 – will be carried out.

Employment and Social Inclusion

Barry Owens of the Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO) gave a presentation to the Group in June 2022. This presentation focused on IASIO's work with the prison population and people who offend in the community.

In partnership with the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service, IASIO's mission is to provide a wide range of resettlement and reintegration supports to criminal justice clients, including access to training, education and employment.

IASIO provides three different services: the Linkage Service (for people on probation), the GATE Service and the Resettlement Service (both of which are for people in prison). Linkage Service Training and Employment Officers (TEOs) are based in Probation offices nationwide and take referrals from Probation Officers only; GATE Service TEOs and Resettlement Service Coordinators (RCs) are based in most Irish prisons and take referrals from someone within the prison, such as the Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) officer, psychologist, Medical Unit, Chaplain, etc.

Up to the end of 2020, 34,236 people had been referred to IASIO Services. From this cohort, almost 20,000 placements have been made into training, education and employment. 6,000 people accessed primary needs resettlement supports (housing, medical cards, Social Welfare etc.) through the Resettlement Service.

Healthcare

In December 2022, Clara Leonard of HSE and Clare Healy of Ana Liffey Drug Project gave a presentation to the Interagency Group on the Dublin North-East Inner City Healthcare Navigation Project for prisoners post-release.

Clara and Clare noted that a gap had been identified in continuation of services for people released from prison. The HSE and NEIC have developed a pilot community aftercare

programme, the Healthcare Navigation Service, in which residents or people with strong local links to the NEIC who are leaving prison will be supported to navigate and engage with health services.

The NEIC initiative commenced in 2017 as an outcome of the Mulvey Report to tackle gangland crime. It consists of 6 sub-groups, of which Inclusion Health is one. Clara coordinates this sub-group, while Clare acts for the host agency, Ana Liffey Drug Project.

Inclusion Health identified that a large number of people are being released from prisons into the NEIC. These people are seen as being at high risk of overdose. Within the Healthcare Navigation Service project, there is a strong emphasis on reintegrating such people back into the community and connecting them with their families.

The Service aims to work with a caseload of 20 people at any given time. For the pilot programme, referrals are taken from Mountjoy Prison and the Dóchas Centre. A clear and precise healthcare plan is developed with service users pre-release, with healthcare needs identified. Social supports within the community are pinpointed, while engagement with peer mentors is encouraged pre- and post-release.

To date, the experience has overall been positive. The Service has been well received, while there have been expressions of need from other services. It is planned to evaluate the overall success of the project once the pilot phase has been completed. The pilot will last for one year from when referrals started.

There will be engagement on a weekly basis with other agencies, and the team will be able to link with key workers in these agencies. They will have access to assertive outreach teams. All the relevant services attend the multi-disciplinary meetings, which are held once a week.

4.2 Research proposals

The Review Group on Penal Policy highlighted the need for evidence-based research to inform penal policy and recommended that the Department of Justice join with other Government Departments and agencies to support research in order to assist in the formulation of penal policy.

The terms of reference of the Interagency Group mandate the Group to identify where research and data collation could assist in greater integration across the public service in terms of the rehabilitation of offenders and the formulation and impact of penal policy.

The Group's Work Programme includes a commitment to review research and data on the rehabilitation of offenders and the formulation and impact of penal policy and recommend where, from an interagency perspective, further research and data are required to underpin policy and to monitor the implementation of service initiatives in the rehabilitation of offenders and the impact of penal policy.

The Interagency Group considered that a study of best international practice in relation to recording, reporting and tracking over time of the social, educational, economic and other relevant characteristics of offenders should be commissioned through the Department's

research and data fund. The focus was on a project that would identify best policy/international experiences with respect to:

- a) What characteristics of an individual are captured by the justice system and at which stage of the justice journey is the information governed/quality-assured? (Data related)
- b) What cross-Departmental interventions are used to coordinate the care of offenders to promote moving away from reoffending? (Policy)
- c) How are the captured characteristics utilised/shared between agencies to measure the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing recidivism? (Data related)
- d) How is policy intervention measured and recorded i.e. what are the best metrics for measuring success? (Policy)

In light of the best international evidence, recommendations would be made on how best to develop a comprehensive, reliable and regular profile of offenders to support interagency cooperation to rehabilitate offenders and reduce crime and to evaluate the success of cross-Government interventions.

In line with Action 156 of the Department's Justice Plan 2021 (to commission research on an offender's experience and interaction with state services in the areas of health, education, employment and housing to provide an insight into quality of life and integration into the community), the Penal Policy team in the Department, along with the Research and Data Analytics team, started this process in 2021. A request for tender was commissioned for an initial Rapid Evidence Review on the experience of people who offend both within and outside of the criminal justice system. The title of the review was *Understanding reoffending: Push factors and preventative responses*.

This evidence review had a number of goals. Firstly, the review should develop a synthesis of evidence, bringing together all available high quality research related to mapping the push factors linked to reoffending. Evidence of this nature will help to inform policy makers and agencies responsible for the management of those who offend of the reasons underpinning reoffending. In addition, it will also help to improving data collection efforts across agencies with responsibilities in this area thereby improving interagency cooperation regarding the management of those who offend.

A further goal of the review was to explore interagency-based programmes which coordinate the care of those who offend to promote moving away from reoffending. This in turn will assist agencies in providing more effective and safer rehabilitative custody and improve the supervision of community sanctions.

This approach aimed to summarise the knowledge base of an issue in a timely and accessible manner in order to inform practice and policy decisions related to reoffending. Rapid reviews are rigorous and explicit methods that avail of the evidence required for policy recommendations in a short timescale.

Following a competitive procurement process, a research team was commissioned from Portsmouth University to carry out this work, which started in October 2021. Originally, Portsmouth University had signed a 3-month contract with the Department, but that was

extended due to interruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The completed research was presented to the Group in September 2022.

In this piece of work, Dr. Megan Coughlan and Dr. Dennis Gough have provided the Group with evidence regarding the push factors linked to reoffending, and the effectiveness of interagency-based programmes which coordinate the care of those who offend to promote moving away from reoffending. This builds upon Professor Ian O'Donnell's 2020 evidence review of recidivism and policy responses, but it is important to note that it differs from Professor O'Donnell's research in that it presents a thematic understanding of the primary factors linked to reoffending and desistance alongside the evaluation of multi-agency programmes in this regard. The researchers also pointed out that elements of the report could align with Restorative Justice commitments made in the Programme for Government and currently being developed by the Department.

As the researches emphasised, the process of moving from offending to successful social integration is complex, and obstacles stemming from the person themselves, their relationships as well as wider circumstances are exceedingly common. Programmes that encourage desistance should:

- Work “with” people to overcome obstacles;
- Build a rapport between professional and service user;
- Build on a person's strengths and capabilities in the context of practical difficulties, e.g. accommodation, education, accessing welfare and employment;
- Focus on future orientated goals; and
- Encourage involvement with local committees or groups.

On the subject of multi-agency work itself, the researchers set out a roadmap for successful interagency cooperation. Central and critical to this are:

- Clarity of leadership;
- The relative clarity of aims and roles;
- The introduction of clear processes and plans to communicate the aims and goals of such relationships to frontline staff; and
- The ability to manage any resultant conflicts of power and culture between different professional groups which emerge when organisations work together.

Appendix A

2022 Membership of Interagency Group

Mr. John O'Callaghan, Department of Justice, Chairperson
Ms. Anne Keeley, Department of Social Protection
Mr. Ben Ryan, Department of Justice
Ms. Bríd McGlinchey, Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science (from June 2022)
Ms. Edel Higgins, Irish Prison Service
Mr. Felix Coleman, Central Statistics Office
Mr. Fergal Black
Mr. Finbarr Lane, Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science (to June 2022)
Ms. Fíona Ní Chinnéide, Probation Service
Mr. Jim Walsh, Department of Health
Mr. Joseph Doyle, Health Service Executive
Ms. Karen O'Connor, Department of Health
Ms. Karolina Farrell, Department of Health (from June 2022)
Ms. Kate Mulkerrins, An Garda Síochána
Mr. Ken Keating, Department of Justice
Ms. Mary O'Regan, Department of Justice
Ms. Melanie Rhatigan, Irish Prison Service
Ms. Rachel Lillis, Probation Service
Ms. Rosemarie Tobin, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage
Mr. Ruairí Ferrie, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage
Ms. Ruth Penney, Courts Service
Ms. Siobhán Cafferty, Project Manager of Department of Justice's Social Enterprise & Employment Strategy 2021-2023
Mr. William O'Brien, Department of Social Protection

Secretary to the Interagency Group

Mr. Timothy Hurley, Department of Justice (to December 2022)
Mr. Aidan Ryan, Department of Justice (from December 2022)

Appendix B

Attendance at 2022 meetings of the Interagency Group

Bodies represented	Meetings	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total meetings attended
Chairperson*		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Central Statistics Office		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Courts Service		X	X	X	X	0
Dept. Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Dept. Health		X	✓	✓	X	2
Dept. Housing, Local Government & Heritage		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Dept. Justice		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Dept. Social Protection		X	✓	✓	✓	3
An Garda Síochána		X	X	X	X	0
Health Service Executive		X	✓	✓	✓	3
Irish Prison Service		✓	✓	X	X	2
Probation Service		✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Working to Change		✓	✓	✓	✓	4

* Ben Ryan (Department of Justice) stood in as Chair for meeting of 23 March 2022