



# Unlocking Community Alternatives – A Cork Approach

February 1st, 2012



Seirbhís Phríosúin na hÉireann  
IRISH PRISON SERVICE



## *Unlocking Community Alternatives*

### *A Cork Approach*

- 1. Background**
- 2. The Development of a Cork Specific Strategy**
- 3. Views of the CPT/Inspector of Prisons in relation to Cork Prison**
- 4. “Unlocking Community Alternatives – A Cork Approach”**
- 5. Strategy to reduce Cork Prison Numbers**
- 6. Replacement of Cork Prison**
- 7. Strategic Outcomes**

## **1. Background**

The Irish Prison Service is currently developing a three-year Strategic Plan covering the period 2012-2014.

The High Level Goals underpinning the plan are to ensure Ireland's compliance with domestic and international human rights obligations and best practice and to improve prisoner rehabilitation through the development of a multiagency approach to addressing offending.

In order to deliver on our High Level Goals, six strategic actions have been identified centering on the following areas:

- 1. Prisoner Numbers**  
Reducing chronic overcrowding in a number of prisons including Cork by increasing structured temporary release.
- 2. Prisoner Progression**  
Giving effect to the principles of normalisation, progression and rehabilitation through a restructuring of the prison system.
- 3. Prisoner Programmes**  
Participating in the development of a multiagency approach of end to end, joined up care from pre to post imprisonment with particular focus on distinctive groups including females, juveniles and those suffering from mental illness.
- 4. The Prison Estate**  
Eliminating slopping out and improving physical conditions in older parts of the estate.
- 5. Management and Staffing**  
Implementing the provisions of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 in order to maintain essential front line services.
- 6. Consolidation of Prison Legislation**  
Consolidating prison-related legislation in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality.

## **2. The Development of a Cork Specific Strategy**

Early in his appointment as Minister for Justice and Equality, Minister Shatter visited Cork prison and saw first hand the chronic levels of overcrowding and inadequate physical infrastructure, including the lack of in-cell sanitation.

In December 2011, on the appointment of the Director General of the Irish Prison Service, the Minister requested that, in advance of the provision of an overall IPS Strategic Plan by April

2012, a specific strategy be presented to him by the end of January, 2012 to specifically address the overcrowding and accommodation issues in Cork prison. This paper sets out proposals for consideration by the Minister to address these issues with a view to getting approval in principle to proceed.

### **3. Views of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment (CPT)/ Inspector of Prisons in relation to Cork Prison**

In the report of their visit to Ireland in 2010, the CPT raised serious concerns about deteriorating conditions in Cork prison as a result of the poor physical infrastructure and overcrowding. They further stated that the poor conditions were exacerbated by the lack of in-cell sanitation.

The Inspector of Prisons has also raised concerns about severe overcrowding in Cork prison and the lack of in-cell sanitation.

### **4. “Unlocking Community Alternatives – A Cork Approach”**

In order to address the Minister’s concerns and those of the Inspector of Prisons and the CPT, a development plan has been drafted for Cork prison which aims to take strategic action to address the twin problems of chronic overcrowding and the inadequate physical infrastructure. This plan will be incorporated into the overall Strategic Plan for 2012-2014 which aims to address, inter alia, these issues across the prison estate.

### **5. Strategy to Reduce Cork Prison Numbers**

The current bed capacity of Cork prison is 272. The accommodation available in Cork prison comprises 141 cells, none of which have in-cell sanitation.

The daily average number of prisoners in custody in Cork prison in 2011 was 295. There were 2,600 committals to Cork prison in 2011, an increase of 74% on the numbers committed to the prison in 2007 (1,492). Of the overall number of committals to the prison in 2011, more than 75% or 1,962 were committed for sentences of 12 months or less.

As an interim measure, by the end of January, 2012 the bed capacity of Cork prison will be reduced to 250. This will provide some measure of respite to the prison in terms of easing overcrowding. Thereafter, it is intended to further reduce the bed capacity at Cork prison to 220. This, in part, will be achieved with the coming on stream of new accommodation in the Midlands Prison in Autumn 2012.

It is acknowledged that the Inspector of Prisons has recommended that the maximum capacity of Cork Prison should be 194. Regrettably, given the levels of committals to Cork prison and the

overall requirement for prison accommodation in the Munster region, this is not possible to achieve in the short term within the existing accommodation available in Cork. However, this will be dealt with in the medium term through the construction of a new prison on the existing prison site (see 6 below for further details).

The reduction in the bed capacity in Cork prison will be achieved, *inter alia*, through the enhancement of sentence management, prisoner interventions and structured release of suitably risk assessed prisoners into the community on a multi agency approach basis. In conjunction with the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service hosted a multi agency meeting in Cork on 27 January, 2012 with a view to exploring potential solutions to the provision of effective community based programmes which could act as alternatives to custody for suitably risk assessed prisoners serving short term sentences in Cork prison. The meeting was attended by over 100 people drawn from statutory and non-statutory community-based services, including An Garda Síochána.

Arising from that meeting an action plan is being put in place:

- To develop mechanisms for co-ordination and co-operation between Cork Prison and community-based services and between the services themselves, to ensure greater coherence and responsivity in services and to avoid duplication and competition;
- To map existing services and gaps in services, including regional deficiencies and develop new and expanded services in partnership with statutory and non-statutory bodies, exploring new models for provision such as social impact investments;
- To engage constructively with all the major stakeholders to build support for effective alternative measures; to develop diversion alternatives such as restorative justice, community service and treatment options (to address substance dependencies and mental ill-health);
- To develop mechanisms for high-level co-ordination and co-operation between Government agencies and ensure maximum permissible sharing and use of data;
- To strengthen the existing system of sentence planning from assessment to pre and post release planning and support; to involve prisoners directly in identifying their needs and drawing up plans; to appoint a dedicated case manager for each prisoner; to explore the option of a dedicated assessment unit, and to involve families and community services in the process;
- To ensure, according as prisoner numbers are reduced, that temporary release is only granted where it has been earned by prisoners through good behaviour and engagement with services and that releases are managed in such a way as to allow seamless links with community-based services; to enhance access of approved services to prisoners in custody, co-ordinated through a single contact point;

- To enhance the Community Return (CR) programme (whereby suitable prisoners are granted temporary release subject to conditions such as service to the community under the supervision of the Probation Service); to revise the criteria for CR to include options such as attendance at a treatment centre or engagement with specific community groups or programmes post release;
- To begin work immediately with a specific cohort of suitably risk assessed prisoners currently serving sentences of 12 months or less to put appropriate supports and programmes in place that will facilitate their early release and reduce their risk of recidivism; to develop social impact investment options to underpin this initiative;
- To strengthen family supports to facilitate on-going contact with prisoners while in custody and their re-integration post-release; to provide programmes inside and outside prison for families;
- To explore the possibility of developing step-down facilities for prisoners approaching the end of their sentence and immediately post-release, with appropriate supports and programmes;
- To examine options for getting prisoner views and inputs.

A project management structure will be put in place to drive these actions with a view towards achieving the desired outcomes.

## **6. Replacement of Cork Prison**

Six weeks ago the Irish Prison Service commissioned independent consultants to explore the redevelopment options for Cork prison.

The advisors considered all options namely:

Option A      Do nothing

Option B      Phased refurbishment of Cell Blocks

    B1      Decant prisoners across the IPS institutions

    B2      Decant prisoners to a new 75 cell unit on existing Cork footprint

Option C      Phased redevelopment of entire Prison

    C1      Decant prisoners across the IPS institutions



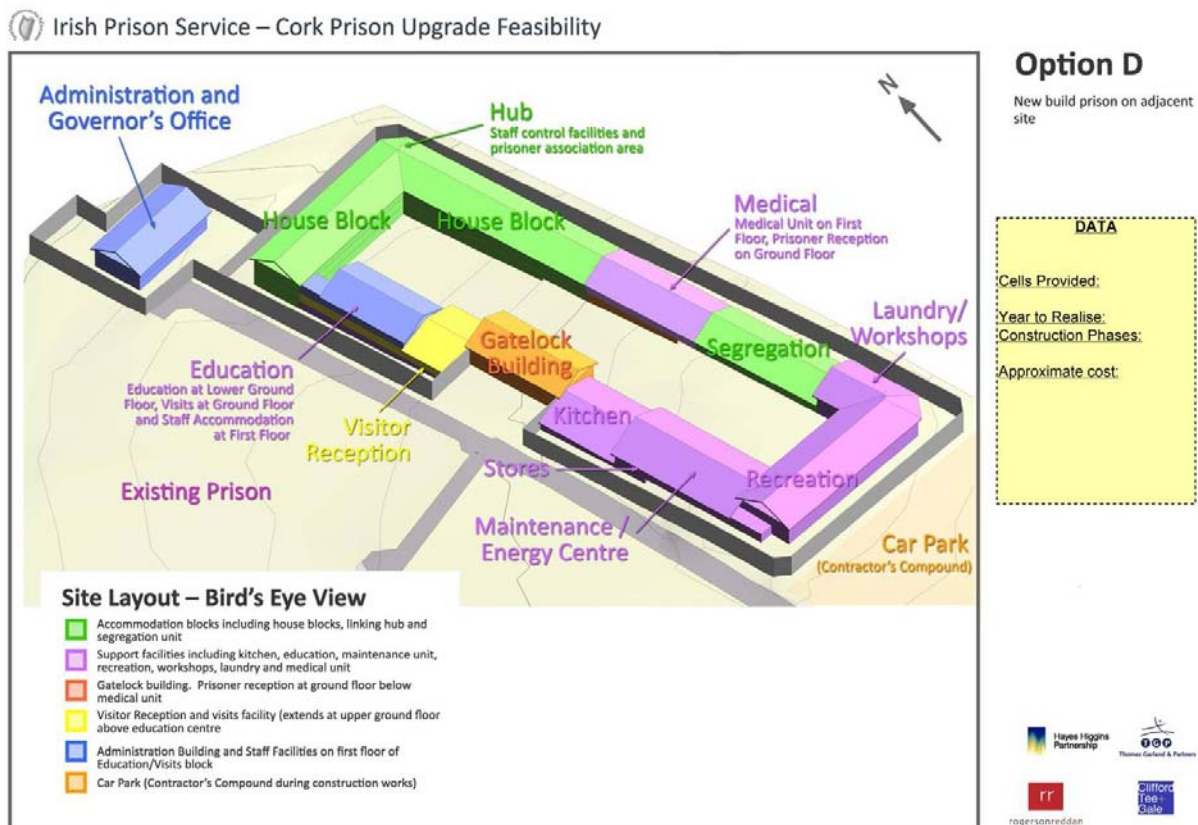
C2 Decant prisoners to a new 75 cell unit on existing Cork footprint

Option D New 150 Cell Prison

Based on their analysis as above, the advisors concluded that Option D – the construction of a new 150 cell block with all related and support ancillary services provided on the adjacent prison car park site– was the only practical response which would address promptly the deficiencies which currently exist in the fabric and services infrastructure of the prison and in a value for money fashion without compromising the prisons continued operation. A preliminary concept design, prepared by the consultants, is illustrated below.

This option has the full support of the Irish Prison Service Senior Management Team, the Governor of Cork Prison and his Senior Management Team.

Option D – New Development on Adjacent Site – Concept Design Only





## **7. Strategic Outcomes**

Through the implementation of this plan, we will achieve the following outcomes:

- Introduction, in conjunction with the Probation Service, of effective community alternatives to allow suitably risk assessed prisoners serving shorter term sentences to serve a part of their sentence in the community; This is dependent on sanction being given to the Probation Service to engage additional community service supervisors within their existing budget.
- Development of an inclusive model of working with offenders in Cork to ensure delivery of services that are responsive to prisoner needs and reduce risk of re-offending.
- Development of well-functioning partnerships with statutory and non-statutory community-based services focused on prisoner rehabilitation and resettlement.
- Elimination of chronic overcrowding in Cork prison.
- Enhancement of the existing system of sentence management to ensure effective assessment of risk and need, delivery of services and throughcare, as well as involvement of prisoners, their families and community services.
- Effective delivery of structured activities for prisoners while they are in custody.
- Operation of temporary release programmes on a structured, planned basis where it is earned by good behaviour and engagement with services.
- Replacement of the current prison with a modern, purpose built 150 cell prison with full in-cell sanitation including shower, toilet and wash hand basin by Spring 2015. This is dependent on the capital allocation being maintained at existing levels up to 2015. We will ensure that the new facility adheres fully to the “Best Practise Guidelines for the design of Irish Prisons” as set down in the Design Guidance Manual for Irish Prisons 2011.
- Development of cost effective proposals, reflecting the strategic needs of the Irish Prison Service, to maximise any possible potential of the current Cork Prison site.
- Development of an effective communication strategy on this action plan.







*Seirbhís Phríosúin na hÉireann*  
**IRISH PRISON SERVICE**

Irish Prison Service HQ, IDA Business Park, Ballinalee Road, Longford, Co. Longford  
Telephone: +353 43 33 35100 Fax: +353 43 33 35371 info@irishprisons.ie

[www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie)