

## **Minister Shatter publishes the Joint Probation Service - Irish Prison Service Women's Strategy 2014 – 2016 and the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service Annual Reports 2013.**

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Mr Alan Shatter TD, today published the Joint Probation Service and Irish Prison Service Women's Strategy 2014 - 2016 entitled "An Effective Response to Women Who Offend". This joint strategy sets out how the two agencies will provide tailored interventions for women with the aim to reduce offending among women and improve outcomes.

Welcoming its publication, Minister Shatter said ***"International research and practice indicates that better outcomes can be achieved by using gender informed approaches. The Women's Strategy published today sets out how the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service will work together, as well as with other statutory, community and voluntary sector partners, to provide women-focused interventions to help reduce offending, improve opportunities for reintegration and to improve outcomes more generally. This co-operative approach is a direct result of the Joint Strategy I published last year which aims delivers more effective offender management and I am proud that these positive initiatives are being taken during my time as Minister for Justice and Equality."***

The Minister commented ***"It is recognised that most women who offend pose a low risk to society. However, they do, generally, have a high level of need. This high level of need can make the impact of imprisonment for a woman, her family and children disproportionately harsh. The intention behind this joint strategy is to tackle this by a dedicated and effective approach to working with women offenders."***

The Minister also published the Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2013 and the Probation Service Annual Report 2013.

### **Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2013**

Speaking about the Prison Service Annual Report Minister Shatter said, ***" I am encouraged to note that the figures contained in the report, show the first significant decrease in committals to prison since 2007 with 15,735 committals, a decrease of 7.6% on the 2012 total (of 17,026). This reduction in committals to prison and the resulting number in custody is welcomed."***

13,055 persons were sent to prison in 2013 compared to 13,860 in 2012, which represents a decrease of 5.8%. The daily average number of prisoners in custody in 2013 has also reduced from 4,318 in 2012 to 4,158 last year.

The 2013 Annual Report for the Irish Prison Service sets out the progress made in relation to its strategic actions and also outlines developments during the year. The report provides an overview of the Service, general information on the prison estate, and reports on progress made to the end of 2013 on the Service's Three Year Strategic Plan which was launched in April, 2012.

Minister Shatter stated ***“The trend of increasing committals to prison seems to have abated, moving the focus away from the constant battle against overcrowding and allowing the Irish Prison Service to focus on the implementation of its Strategic Plan. I am pleased to note the progress achieved by the Irish Prison Service in this regard.”*** Commenting further, the Minister noted that, ***“Dedicated committals units have now been established in all committal prisons and appropriate assessment procedures to ensure that prisoners are accommodated according to their security status have been introduced”.***

Work has continued on the implementation of the Irish Prison Service Drugs Policy and Strategy to develop drug treatment services and enhance supply reduction measures across the prison estate. Drug free units have been established in the majority of prisons.

Action has also been taken by the Irish Prison Service to reduce the number of prisoners held on restricted regimes with a view to ensuring that all receive, as a minimum standard, out of cell time of 3 hours per day. A high level group was established in July and, as a result, the number of prisoners on a restricted regime across the system decreased by 32% from 339 in July to 228 by year end. In addition, the number of prisoners on 22/23 hour lock up decreased by 161 or almost 76% from 211 to 50 during the year.

In line with the commitment given in the Programme for Government, action has been taken to modernise the prison estate and introduce in-cell sanitation in every locked cell. The refurbishment project in Mountjoy Prison continued in 2013 with the refurbishment of the A, B and C Wings now completed. In addition, the contract was signed to allow construction to commence on the new prison in Cork. The number of prisoners having to slop out reduced from in excess of 800 to less than 500 by the end of 2013.

### **Probation Service Annual Report 2013**

Speaking about the publication of the Probation Service Annual Report 2013, Minister Shatter said, ***“It remains my belief that crime must be met by an effective proportionate sanction which for many offenders can be dealt with by community sanctions as opposed to custody. The 2013 report sets out how the Probation Service works with offenders by holding them to account for their behaviour, and through a range of targeted interventions and programmes, bring about positive changes in their lives, with the aim of avoiding further offending”***

The 2013 report outlines out how the Probation Service focussed its work on the delivery of effective programmes, women offenders, young offenders, the provision of assessment reports for the Courts and the management of sex offenders. Progress is reported on implementing the key objectives in the Probation Service Strategy Statement for 2011 - 2014 and developments during the year are outlined in considerable detail.

The Minister said ***“I am concerned with the continued drop in Community Service Orders made. There were 2,354 Community Service Orders made in 2013 compared to 2,569 in 2012 and 2,738 Orders in 2011. Although this drop should be seen in the same context as the drop in committals from court to prison, it is particularly disappointing when the Probation Service has the capacity to take on more offenders.”*** The Minister added ***“While these figures are***

*certainly better than in the years prior to the review of community service, I want to ensure that even greater use of community service is made. Under the Criminal Justice (Community Service) (Amendment) Act in 2011, judges are required to consider the appropriateness of a community service order in circumstances where an alternative sentence of imprisonment of up to 12 months would be considered. The effects of this legislation should be more visible in the numbers of Orders made.”*

Minister Shatter also said *“I am strongly of the view that we need to keep the numbers of people committed to prison for the non-payment of fines to the absolute minimum. We have already legislated to require judges to take a person’s financial circumstances into account when setting a fine. Work is now well underway on further major reforms to the fine payment and recovery system in Ireland. The Fines (Payment and Recovery) Bill, which I expect will be enacted before the Summer, will make it easier for people to pay a fine and where they fail to do so, there will be sufficient options available to the courts in the form of, for example, attachment of earnings, community service, or recovery orders to reduce the need to commit anyone to prison for the non-payment of fines.”*

Minister Shatter added, **“I would also like to acknowledge the very significant contribution made by the Probation Service to the development of the General Scheme of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill, which I published last month. This new legislation will replace the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 with modern provisions dealing with community sanctions and the role of the Probation Service in the criminal justice system. While the existing legislation has served us well, it is now time to bring forward an updated statement of the law governing community sanctions and the role of the Probation Service which reflects modern thinking and best modern practice. The new legislation will facilitate the effective and efficient use of community sanctions by the courts and will ensure that the courts have a wide range of appropriate options for dealing with persons who have committed minor offences.”**

Both the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service Reports for 2013 contain an update on progress in implementing the **Joint Irish Prison Service/Probation Service Strategic Plan 2013 – 2015** which was published in May, 2013. On foot of a commitment contained in the Programme for Government, this joint strategy sets out how these two organisations can co-ordinate with each other to integrate offender management programmes.

At the launch today Minister Shatter was also presented with the Annual Report, 2013 for Tús Nua, a residential project for women offenders, operated by DePaul Ireland and funded by the Probation Service. The Minister acknowledged that the support of the community and voluntary sector will be crucial to implementing the new interagency women’s strategy saying, *“Tús Nua is a residential project for women offenders, managed by DePaul Ireland, and funded by my Department through the Probation Service. Tús Nua works closely with the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service to support women offenders to reintegrate into the community on their release from custody. I am pleased to receive the Tús Nua annual report for 2013 and to congratulate them on their achievement of supporting the reintegration of so many women by the provision of accommodation and other support services in a low threshold, female orientated environment.”*

The Joint Probation Service - Irish Prison Service Strategy 2014-2016 – “An Effective Response to Women who Offend” and the 2013 Annual Reports are available to download at [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)

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