

**Address by Alan Shatter, T.D.,
Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence
at
the launch of the Irish Prison Service Three-Year Strategic Plan
30 April, 2012
Irish Prison Service Training & Development Centre,
Beladd House, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.**

Distinguished Guests, Judge Reilly, Inspector of Prisons.

I am delighted to be with you here today in the Irish Prison Service Training & Development Centre to launch the new Three-Year Strategic Plan for the Irish Prison Service.

The Strategy contains a new mission statement and vision for the Irish Prison Service – a mission to “provide safe and secure custody, dignity of care and rehabilitation to prisoners for safer communities” and a vision for the Service of “a safer community through excellence in a prison service built on respect for human dignity”.

The key objectives are -

- Increasing public safety by maintaining safe and secure custody for all those committed by the courts and by reducing reoffending and improving prisoner rehabilitation through the development of a multiagency approach to offending;
- Ensuring Ireland’s compliance with domestic and international human rights obligations and best practice; and

- Delivering reform and implementing change in accordance with the Public Service Agreement and the Integrated Reform Plan for the Justice and Equality Sector.

The Irish Prison Service plays a very important role in providing safe care and secure custody of all of those committed to it by the courts. The role of the Service is also to engage with convicted prisoners in a realistic and meaningful way in order to reduce their reoffending and enhance their reintegration back into society. By doing so, the Service can not only contribute to public safety and a reduction in recidivism but also ensure that convicted offenders properly serve sentences imposed on them and that decisions made relating to prisoners in its care do not result in any unnecessary danger/risk to the wider community. This cannot be done by the Prison Service on its own. It requires the Service to work in close partnership with key Departments, agencies and organisations in the community and non-statutory sector.

I am glad to see that the Strategic Plan includes concrete and practical, if ambitious, targets.

These include endeavouring to align the capacity of our prisons with the guidelines laid down by the Inspector of Prisons in so far as this is compatible with public safety and the integrity of the criminal justice system. The Inspector of Prisons, Judge Michael Reilly, has done considerable work in setting a benchmark against which the Irish Prison Service is to be measured and I am heartened to see that many of his recommendations have been translated into concrete steps to be taken by the Service over the coming three years.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Judge Reilly for his guidance and constructive advice to the Irish Prison Service and local management of prisons on a variety of matters. You will be aware of my recent decision that all deaths in custody or of those recently released from prison are now to be investigated by the Inspector. I welcome the impartiality and indeed rigour that this recent development will bring.

Returning to the Strategy, I am particularly pleased to note the actions centred specifically around juvenile offenders. The detention of children in St. Patrick's Institution will end with the provision of more appropriate accommodation and regimes in the new detention facility at Oberstown by mid-2014. This is thanks to investment by the Irish Youth Justice Service under the auspices of my colleague Frances FitzGerald, TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and signals the Government's commitment to address children's issues. Only last week we jointly launched new legislation making it an offence not to report serious crimes against children and Heads of a Bill to implement the Children First Guidelines on a statutory basis. I should add these are primarily child protection measures and are not intended to generate more business for the Irish Prison Service.

We are committed to eliminating the practice of slopping out in our prison system and upgrading outdated, and in some cases, Victorian accommodation as set out in the Government Programme for National Recovery. The Strategy I am launching here today outlines a 40-month capital plan to provide in-cell sanitation in all cells and significantly improve prison conditions in the older parts of the prison estate. In fact, the largest single allocation of the capital allocation to the Justice Sector for 2012 was provided to the Prisons Service to fund the Prison Service Building Programme. This allows for the completion of a new 300-space prison wing in the Midlands Prison which is expected to become operational later this year. The Capital Plan also provides for continuation of the refurbishment and in-cell sanitation project in Mountjoy Prison which will be a major improvement on the existing physical conditions, including the provision of in-cell sanitation.

By the end of this year, almost 60 percent of cells in the prison will have in-cell sanitation and by 2014 the whole prison will have been radically upgraded providing a much improved physical environment for both staff and prisoners. Detailed plans are also being finalised for the replacement of Cork prison through the construction of a new modern prison on the adjacent prison car park site and I also understand that planning has commenced in relation to the replacement of

parts of Limerick prison which are no longer fit for purpose in the twenty first century.

Our prisons are not intended to be mere warehouses for criminals and I want to see an increased emphasis on rehabilitation. To this end, the Prison Service is setting out to re-engineer our prison system to give further effect to the principles of normalisation, progression and reintegration. This is done through work training and education, but also through the work of the medical, dental and other healthcare services, the psychology service and the chaplaincy not forgetting the inputs from the Probation Service and voluntary and community organisations. Of particular importance to this process is the introduction of the new Incentivised Regimes Policy, and the continuing roll-out of the Integrated Sentence Management programme.

Incentivised Regime provides for a differentiation of privileges between prisoners according to their level of engagement with services and quality of behaviour. It is mandatory for each prison and for all prisoners. The objective is to provide tangible incentives to prisoners to participate in structured activities and to reinforce incentives for good behaviour, leading to a safer and more secure environment. There are three levels of privilege provided for – basic, standard and enhanced. In practice, newly committed prisoners will enter at the standard level. They will progress to the enhanced level by meeting the criteria for that level, notably by exemplary behaviour and satisfactory engagement in structured activities, and, for those offenders eligible, participation in Integrated Sentence Management. Regression to the basic level will result from failure to meet the criteria for the standard level, notably by failure to meet normal behaviour standards and/or consistent refusal to engage in structured activities.

The intended incentives at the enhanced level potentially include:

- a level of gratuity higher than standard,
- higher levels of access to private cash and tuck shop expenditure,
- priority access to better quality accommodation,

- an enhanced daily regime,
- enhanced facilities and
- increased contact with the outside world.

At the enhanced level, prisoners must participate actively in structured activities in education, work/training and/or offender programmes for a specified time. The level of participation and commitment will be confirmed by the person in charge of the activity, for example the head teacher, industrial manager or senior psychologist.

This policy has the potential to deliver a safer and more secure environment for prisoners and staff and to enhance prisoner rehabilitation through greater involvement in sentence planning and structured activities. The policy will also develop the role of prison officers - class officers and ACOs in particular - and can be a catalyst for bringing about cultural change in the prisons.

Integrated Sentence Management goes hand in hand with the Incentivised Regime and involves a new orientation in the delivery of services to prisoners and a new emphasis on prisoners taking greater personal responsibility for their own development through active engagement with both specialist and non-specialist services in the prisons. The end result will be a prisoner-centred, multidisciplinary approach to working with prisoners with provision for initial assessment, goal setting and periodic review to measure progress.

Newly committed prisoners with a sentence of greater than one year are eligible to take part in Integrated Sentence Management. If they agree to participate, an assessment is undertaken to identify the needs of the prisoner in several areas such as accommodation, education and offending behaviour. Referrals are made on foot of this assessment to services within the prison such as Education or Work & Training and outside agencies providing an in-reach service. These services and agencies carry out their own assessment of the prisoner and feed their recommended actions back to the Integrated Sentence Management Co-

ordinator. From this a Personal Integration Plan of actions for the prisoner to complete during his/her time in prison is compiled.

Approximately 9 months prior to the release of the prisoner, a Community Integration Plan is developed. This sets out a plan for the prisoner to prepare for his/her release. Important issues such as accommodation, employment or education are addressed to help the prisoner resettle into the community on release and reduce the risk of re-offending.

These policies are, I believe, central to the rehabilitation of those committed to the care of the Irish Prison Service and thereby contribute towards a safer society.

Before I conclude I should also mention the Interdepartmental group on mental health and the criminal justice system we have established. I look forward to its recommendations which may have important implications for diverting the mentally ill from prison and ensuring those in prison receive appropriate treatment.

I also want to say that it is my intention to consolidate and restate prison legislation in clear accessible modern terms and in this context, one of the issues I am currently considering is the area of remission as it is my view that a review of this particular subject is long overdue.

The Strategy is underpinned by the principles of dignity and respect and these principles will be at the heart of what the Service sets out to achieve over the period of the Strategy. I am aware that the Service has a long and proud tradition of providing safe, secure and humane custody to prisoners in its care and I believe that, in this context, this Strategy sets a challenging reform agenda for the next three years.

In all things balance is critically important and I emphasise the fact that in all of this the most vital strategic target is the enhancement of public safety. As a key element of the Criminal Justice System, the Irish Prison Service, along with An Garda Síochána and the Courts, has a critical role to play in this regard and it is

vitaly important that, when what some commentators have described as the inevitable tension between care and custody becomes an issue, we must never lose sight of the need to put public safety and the integrity of the Criminal Justice System to the forefront.

The realisation of the vision that it embodies for the Service is very much dependent on buy-in from every member of staff in the Service, - everyone – in every prison, in headquarters, leaders and those at the interface with prisoners and the support services. Reform cannot be solely driven from the top; it must be driven and embraced by each and every member of staff who must act as the key agents of change. I am glad to see that all the senior managers of the Irish Prison Service are here today, Governors, Directors and other senior staff. Your staff look to you for leadership. Show that leadership! If you embrace the objectives outlined in this strategic plan; lead and drive them then together you can make the changes that are required to transform the prison system in a progressive and positive way.