

# COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT PLAN

2016 - 2018



IRISH PRISON SERVICE | CREATING A BETTER ENVIRONMENT



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# FOREWORD

Effective communication is vital to help any organisation to stay efficient and productive. Effective communication involves the seamless flow of information throughout the various internal and external links in the organisation. Anytime the chain of communication breaks, the entire operations of the organisation suffers.

Many internal communication issues were identified through the Dignity at Work consultation process. It is possible to group these issues in three main categories:

- Restricted flow of information throughout the organisation
- Lack of engagement with available information
- Quality of interpersonal communication

As could be expected, these issues combine to create a challenging and problematic communication environment. The challenge for our organisation is not as simple as putting in place more internal communication media, but to develop a culture of open communication.

Open communication cultures are characterised by an effective, unobstructed flow of information through a variety of communication channels. The combination of these channels has the potential to integrate the different perspectives held by various groups and create a common understanding of issues in a reasonable timeframe. This requires a carefully planned and balanced mix of communication channels, with an emphasis on face to face, two way communication supported by other channels of information dissemination, including emails, newsletters, intranet and notices.

The effectiveness of an open communication culture will be measured by focussing on outputs (awareness, understanding and engagement) rather than exclusively on inputs (the communication processes or tools used).

Identifying the behaviours that define an open communication culture is an essential part of the process and has already commenced as part of the Dignity at Work Programme. These behaviours have been integrated to the organisation's competency framework, performance management system and promotional practices. This provides the mechanism for recognising and rewarding people who deliver on the organisational objectives in relation to communication.

Research has repeatedly shown that the front-line managers in an organisation are its key communicators and provide the vital communication link to front line staff. For an organisation to communicate successfully, supervisors must forge a strong, two way communication link with the people that work with them and for them. It is vital that line managers are equipped to meet the challenge of the communication aspect of their roles, both in terms of having the necessary information available to them and in terms of the skills required to communicate effectively.



Caron McCaffrey | **Director of Staff and Corporate Services**

# 1 GENERAL

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Irish Prison Service (IPS) recognises the importance of communicating about the implementation of our strategic objectives, development of our policies and our key priorities with key stakeholders both internally and externally.

## 1.2 INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The aim of this Communications Plan is, inter alia, to improve communication at all levels within the organisation. This includes communication from Headquarters to staff and management at prison level and communication at prison level between management and staff. The Plan also recognises that effective communication is a two way process and identifies mechanisms to facilitate the easy flow of information and feedback from the prison floor to the highest level of senior management in the organisation.

The Plan also recognises that for communication to work within the organisation all staff must play their part. Management are responsible for providing staff with relevant information and staff are responsible for ensuring that they access this information. Good communication is a reciprocal process. For example:

MANAGEMENT SHOULD	STAFF SHOULD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Management should provide staff with appropriate information</li><li>• Management should encourage staff to contribute</li><li>• Management should brief staff on appropriate issues</li><li>• Management should provide staff with constructive feedback</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff should seek information and contribute their views.</li><li>• Staff should seek clarity when needed</li><li>• Staff should share relevant information with colleagues</li><li>• Staff should give constructive feedback to colleagues</li></ul>

### 1.3 EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The Irish Prison Service works in partnership with a wide range of Government Departments, Agencies and Bodies in delivering on its mission and on cross departmental issues.

While we will be open and transparent in all our communications activities we will ensure that all communications are cognisant of the operational requirements of the Service. We will ensure that any communications activities in no way prejudice ongoing criminal investigations by An Garda Síochana or trials which are or will come before the Courts.

We also remain aware of the victims of crime and will ensure that our communications or public commentary will in no way exacerbate the suffering of those who may have already been affected by the actions of those in our custody.

By implementing this Communications Plan, the Irish Prison Service can explain to a wide and diverse audience how we carry out our key functions and work in partnership with others to deliver on our vision and mission. We can also give the community a valuable insight into how prison staff work on a daily basis to make our communities safer.



## 1.4 ORGANISATIONAL VALUES AND BEHAVIOUR

The core values of the organisation are set out in the Strategic Plan 2016-2018. These values will inform the tone of all communications undertaken by the organisation.



### TEAM WORK

**We achieve more by working together than we can as individuals working alone**



### INTEGRITY

**We must always have the courage to do the right thing, the decent thing... even when no else is watching**



### POTENTIAL

**Everyone has the potential to be a better person and we actively seek to provide staff and those in custody with opportunities to realise and achieve this**



### SAFETY

**We actively contribute to maintaining an environment in which staff and those in our custody feel emotionally and physically safe and ultimately contribute to a safer community**



### SUPPORT

**We actively seek to provide supports to staff and support rehabilitation of those in custody**

## 2 AUDIENCES

The key internal and external audiences for the Irish Prison Service include but are not limited to:

**Local Authorities and Public Bodies**  
**EXTERNAL**  
Policy and Strategy Group **Prison**  
The Courts Service **Senior**  
IASIO **Management Team** **based**  
International **management**  
Partners **Prisoners**  
**Executive Management Team**  
**Prison Officers Association**  
**INTERNAL**  
Dept. of Justice and Equality  
Other **Prison Staff**  
Emergency **Headquarters Staff**  
Services  
**Government and Oireachtas**  
The Inspector of Prisons  
**Members of the Public IASIO**  
**The Media Visiting Committee**  
Defence Forces The Probation Service  
Education Staff Merchants Quay  
The Courts Service An Garda Síochana



## 3 COMMUNICATIONS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Plan outlines our communications aims and objectives, methods and how we intend to communicate both internally and externally. It will also enable the organisation to deal with the communications implications of inevitable unforeseen emergencies.

The Director General undertakes to work effectively and directly both internally and externally to promote our vision, mission and values.

### 3.1 INTERNAL

- Promote awareness and understanding of the organisation's vision, mission and goals among all our staff.
- Promote awareness and understanding of significant policy developments in the organisation among staff.
- To promote awareness and understanding of how our work contributes to a safer Ireland
- Ensure the consistency and quality of information distributed to the Irish Prison Service staff including officers, support staff, partners and other internal stakeholders
- Generate confidence and commitment among staff.
- Encourage two way feedback and get staff involved in organisational development
- Develop effective methods to promote and share achievements.

### 3.2 EXTERNAL

- To promote the work of the Irish Prison Service and raise awareness and understanding of and support for its role.
- To promote the work of the staff of the Irish Prison Service and raise awareness and understanding of and support for their roles
- To provide a co-ordinated and strategic approach to all external communications.
- To maintain a good working relationship with media representatives and our partners so that we can share information that promotes greater understanding and support.
- To provide a press and public relations service during agreed hours, and an on-call duty press officer available at all other times.
- Engage in effective reputation management for Irish Prison Service
- Be aware of the victims of crime and ensure that our communications or public commentary will in no way exacerbate the suffering of those who may have already been effected by the actions of those in custody

## 4 COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND RESOURCES

The Irish Prison Service currently has, and will develop, a variety of organisational resources and tools for communicating with key audiences.

### 4.1 THE IRISH PRISON SERVICE COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION UNIT

The Communications and Information Unit is responsible for External and Internal Communications, for the collation of statistical information and the provision of information and briefing regarding the Irish Prison Service.

Under this Plan the Communications and Information Unit will work with all Irish Prison Service staff and partners to develop enhanced internal and external communication structures and processes.

The Irish Prison Service seeks to develop positive relationships with the media, locally and nationally. Our strategy is to be proactive and responsive in the delivery of this service to the media. This function, which is delivered by the Irish Prison Service Communications Unit, is measured by its capacity to provide accurate information about the work of the Prison Service in a timely manner.

The Communications and Information Unit works with media agencies in the positive promotion of the work of the Prison Service, our staff and our partner agencies. They consider on a case by case basis submissions from media organisations in relation to the recording of documentaries or features inside our prisons. This may range from simple single issue features to in depth documentary features recorded over a period of time.

Other functions of the Communication and Information Unit include:

- To advise members of staff on all media and communications issues.
- Oversee media monitoring to provide alerts on notable current and contentious issues.
- Liaise with our partners on all aspects of communications as they affect the work of Irish Prison Service.
- Write and issue statements or press releases on a wide range of relevant topic areas when required.
- Identify key initiatives and work that would benefit from external publicity.
- Oversee the production of Irish Prison Service's Annual Report.
- Manage the Irish Prison Service external facing Website and internal facing Intranet

**ACTION** The communications and Information Unit will work with all staff to enhance our internal and external communications structures and procedures.

#### Contact the Communications and Information Unit

T | 043 333 5211 / 3 5203

M | 087 667 4284

F | 043 333 5371

E | [pressoffice@irishprisons.ie](mailto:pressoffice@irishprisons.ie)

## 4.2 COMMUNICATIONS SUB GROUPS

When major policy changes are being introduced it is proposed that specific communications sub groups will be established to assist in their effective implementation. These sub groups will have terms of reference which will set out the specific responsibilities of the groups in relation to communicating the particular policy and the associated actions to be accomplished.

These sub groups will be charged with drafting communications strategies for each policy issue. These strategies will include the identification of the various communications objectives, such as awareness, understanding, engagement, etc and the appropriate mix of communications channels to be used to achieve these objectives.

It will be the responsibility of the relevant Director to convene and chair such groups.

**ACTION** Communications subgroups to be established when introducing policy change programmes.

## 4.3 IT ACCESS

A review of the access levels to IT across the organisation will be undertaken as part of the Statedy. The ultimate goal of this review is to ensure that everyone in the organisation has access to online information and communication tools.

**ACTION** An audit of existing access to ICT hardware will be conducted to determine the existing levels of access to IT resources and to make improvements where necessary

# 5 FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION METHODS

## 5.1 SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETINGS

The Irish Prison Service Executive Management team (EMT), Senior Management Team (SMT) and Strategy and Policy Group (SPG) meet on a regular basis. These senior management meetings allow for a two way communication process within the senior Prison Service management structure. This enables management to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our core business and helps in the decision making process. The minutes and related documents of all senior management meetings are published by the Director General on the Intranet to provide staff with the opportunity to keep informed of the key issues which are being considered at that time.

**ACTION** Senior management Team meeting minutes to be published on Intranet on an ongoing basis.

## 5.2 LOCAL MANAGEMENT MEETINGS

Senior management in Directorates and prisons meet on a regular basis to discuss significant issues with regard to their business unit or prison. Such meetings are a forum for two-way communication at management level regarding local issues and national issues which will have effect of the business unit. All minutes of these meetings should be published on the Intranet page of the respective Directorate or prison.

Management should ensure that issues of general concern for staff are then communicated to the wider staff body of that business area.

**ACTION** Management Team (in HQ and Prisons) meeting minutes to be published on Intranet on an ongoing basis.

## 5.3 LOCAL/TEAM MEETINGS & BRIEFINGS

Local management should arrange local/team meetings or briefing sessions to keep all staff informed of important issues concerning their Directorate/Prison or business unit. Such briefing should also be used to communicate significant policy developments which may emanate from senior management meetings.

**ACTION** Management should make arrangements to address/brief their staff at key times during the year.

## 5.4 SENIOR MANAGEMENT BRIEFINGS & FORUMS

Senior management including members of the Executive Management Team will conduct prison visits throughout the year and conduct forums on significant developments within their business area.

**ACTION** Prison visits and forums to be scheduled throughout year including members of EMT.

## 5.5 AWARENESS SESSIONS

Consideration will be given to holding awareness sessions where appropriate to inform key stakeholders with regard to significant developments within the Irish Prison Service. These awareness sessions can be issue specific or they may be more general.

**ACTION** Awareness sessions with regard to significant developments to be arranged as appropriate.

## 5.6 LINE MANAGERS

As line managers and supervisors have a critical role to play in effective communication with staff (both formally and informally) it is essential that they are provided with the necessary information to do so as a matter of priority. Through reviewing the effectiveness of the various channels of communication, this Plan aims to facilitate the effective flow of relevant information to all line managers.

It is equally important to ensure that managers have the appropriate skills to communicate effectively. The communication skills set for managers includes good listening and the ability to facilitate genuine discussion. Line managers must be willing and able to invite, welcome and handle debate and sometimes disagreement, as an essential element of more open and complete communication.

**ACTION** Enhance the communications role of frontline managers and supervisors and provide appropriate communications training.

## 5.7 CONFERENCES/SEMINARS

The Irish Prison Service will be an active participant in conferences and seminars which seek to debate and progress criminal justice issues through senior managers addressing such conferences on areas of expertise. These conferences will provide an opportunity for the Service to engage with key stakeholders. In addition, the Service may, as deemed appropriate, host national or international conferences on key aspects of prison systems or criminal justice in Ireland.

**ACTION** Encourage attendance and participation in conferences and seminars and ensure reports are provided by attendee of conference theme and content.

## 5.8 COMMUNICATIONS CO-ORDINATORS

Under this plan we will endeavour to assign a staff member in each prison, business unit or Directorate responsibility for co-ordinating communications in their location. This communications co-ordinator will act as the primary point of contact for the flow of information to and from their prison, business unit or directorate.

## 5.9 WORKPLACE FORUMS

The purpose of the Workplace Forum is, in the first instance, to provide a mechanism for two way communication and exchange of ideas and information amongst staff.

**ACTION** We will explore options for the introduction of communications co-ordinators and workplace forums in prisons and directorates



## 6 WRITTEN / ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION METHODS

### 6.1 WEBSITE

The Irish Prison Service website [www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie) is a vital tool for both internal and external communication. We will launch a new web platform to support this Strategy and continue to undertake additional development work on the website on an ongoing basis. We will continue to transform our website into an accessible, searchable, reliable and flexible website. The website will be user friendly, use plain English and will become an integral part of our communications activities.

Our website will be used for:

- A public information, education and publishing service
- A staff information source
- A prisoner family information service
- A tool for booking visits for family and professional visitors
- A tool for information, feedback, consultation and engagement with our staff

**ACTION** Relaunch new version the Irish Prison Service Website

### 6.2 INTRANET

Under this Strategy we will develop a new enhanced intranet system to replace IRIS. The new system will be an information and knowledge management system which will be interactive and flexible.

The new system will be multifunctional and will -

- Be the primary source and storage centre for official policies and information
- Be the main announcement centre for the latest Prison Service developments
- Provide a platform for staff to share information, experience and knowledge

**ACTION** Replace existing Intranet portal with new multi-functional Intranet with emphasis on communication

### 6.3 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is now an established and in some cases an essential tool in the communications structures of a large organisation. Facebook is the most popular platform in Ireland with over 1.3 million users in Ireland alone while over 450,000 Irish people have twitter accounts. In addition other sites such as LinkedIn and Youtube continue to grow.

**ACTION** Under this communications plan the Irish Prison Service will continue to explore the use of social media as an appropriate internal and external communications tool.

## 6.4 ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report which is available on [www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie) includes detailed statistical information on committals to prisons over the course of the previous calendar year. The Report also contains detailed statistical information on the snapshot of the prisoner population. The Report also includes updates on the implementation of new strategies, policies and initiatives. We will ensure that the Annual Report is easily understandable, clear and straightforward and free of jargon. Our Annual Report will be published before the end of the second quarter each year.

## 6.5 INTERNAL NEWSLETTER

The IPS Internal Newsletter 'Prison Service News' is published quarterly and includes articles and features which highlight initiatives, provide information on internal developments and share good practice and achievements. IPS News will continue to contain information on latest developments in the Prison Service. The Magazine will also include updates on staff clubs and associations.

**ACTION** Redesign IPS News with focus on information and communications. It will also be published as an "e-zine" on the Intranet and on the website.

## 6.6 INFORMATION LEAFLETS

Explanatory information leaflets on new policies or initiatives will continue to be produced to provide clear information on new developments. There leaflets will be produced as required and distributed to the intended audience using other communications tools such the website or intranet.

**ACTION** Printed Information leaflets will be supplied to all staff to update them on significant developments in policy.

## 6.7 NOTICE BOARDS (INCLUDING ELECTRONIC DISPLAYS)

General notice boards and specific programme notice boards will be installed in all establishments which can be used to provide updates on significant developments in the Irish Prison Service both locally at prison level and nationally.

**ACTION** Electronic noticeboards which allow for various communications formats including MP3 and MP4 based messages will be installed in appropriate areas.



## 6.8 POSTER CAMPAIGNS

**ACTION** Posters to be published to highlight progress or significant developments or to deliver key messages.

## 6.9 SUGGESTION BOXES

**ACTION** Suggestion boxes to be attached to the specific notice-boards to gather input and feedback from stakeholders.

## 6.10 HAVE YOUR SAY!

The Irish Prison Service values the opinions and feedback of its staff and of its partner organisations and agencies. A dedicated email address [haveyoursay@irishprisons.ie](mailto:haveyoursay@irishprisons.ie) was set up as part of the Dignity at Work consultation process. This email address is managed by the Staff & Corporate Services Directorate. This address can be used to voice opinions on issues of concern or provide feedback on new developments or proposals. All communications to the have-your-say email will be considered by the Irish Prison Service and responded to in a timely manner.

# 7 MONITORING

The effectiveness of this strategy will be monitored by the Irish Prison Service Communications and Information Unit. Communications activity and the actions identified in this strategy will be evaluated and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

# 8 CONCLUSION

The Irish Prison Service Communications Strategy is aimed at supporting the work programme and strategic objectives of the Service. It is a working document which will guide our Prisons, Business Units and Directorates in achieving these objectives in an open and transparent manner. The Strategy sets out the communications aims, target audiences and tools that we will use to communicate with all our key stakeholders.

# SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS

- The communications and Information Unit will work with all staff to enhance our internal and external communications structures and procedures.
- Communications subgroups to be established when introducing policy change programmes.
- An audit of existing access to ICT hardware will be conducted to determine the existing levels of access to IT resources and to make improvements where necessary
- Senior management Team meeting minutes to be published on Intranet on an ongoing basis.
- Management Team (in HQ and Prisons) meeting minutes to be published on Intranet on an ongoing basis.
- Management should make arrangements to address/brief their staff at key times during the year.
- Prison visits and forums to be scheduled throughout year including members of EMT
- Awareness sessions with regard to significant developments to be arranged as appropriate
- Enhance the communications role of frontline managers and supervisors and provide appropriate communications training.
- Encourage attendance and participation in conferences and seminars and ensure reports are provided by attendee or conference theme and content.
- We will explore options for the introduction of communications co-ordinators and workplace forums in prisons and Directorates
- Relaunch new version the Irish Prison Service Website
- Replace existing Intranet portal with new multi-functional Intranet with emphasis on Communication
- Under this communications plan the Irish Prison Service will continue to explore the use of social media as an appropriate internal and external communications tool.
- Redesign IPS News with focus on information and communications. It will also be published as an “e-zine” on the Intranet and on the website.
- Printed Information leaflets will be supplied to all staff to update them on significant developments in policy.
- Electronic noticeboards which allow for various communications formats including MP3 and MP4 based messages will be installed in appropriate areas.
- Posters to be published to highlight progress or significant developments or to deliver key messages.
- Suggestion boxes to be attached to the specific notice-boards to gather input and feedback from stakeholders.





**IRISH PRISON SERVICE**

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CREATING A BETTER ENVIRONMENT

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