

In attendance:

Minister of State David Stanton TD (chair)

Deaglán Ó Briain	IYJS, Department of Justice and Equality
Brendan Sheehy	IYJS, Department of Justice and Equality
Tony O'Donovan	IYJS, Department of Children and Youth Affairs
Brian Dack	Probation Service
Collette Quinn	Garda National Bureau for Child Diversion
Pat Bergin	Director Oberstown Children's Detention Campus
Martin Shiel	Department of Education and Skills
Michael Murchan	Department of Health
Dr Sean Redmond	University of Limerick
Eddie Darcy	Solas
Tanya Ward	Childrens Rights Alliance
Sinéad Murphy	IYJS, Department of Justice and Equality (Secretary)
Kevin Stewart	IYJS, Department of Justice and Equality
Dr Louise Forde	University College Cork

Apologies:

Dr Katharina Swirak	University College Cork
Professor Ursula Kilkelly	University College Cork
Mary Cregg	Department of Education and Skills
Berni Donovan	Tusla

1. Introductions

Minister of State Stanton welcomed everybody to the meeting and a round of introductions took place.

2. Minutes of the previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed

3. Strategy Vision Statement and Principles

Vision Statement

The group then discussed the Vision document which was circulated prior to the meeting and the following points were put forward-

The target audience for the vision statement should be considered when deciding on a final version. If the audience is the public, the statement should be less policy based and more focused on the human side.

MoS Stanton expressed the view that the vision statement should be action-based and should challenge people to work together to tackle issues relating to youth justice. It is also important that the vision statement is child centred.

It was suggested that the goal of the strategy should be to help and support children. Other benefits like a safer society or justice for victims should be outcomes of the strategy as opposed to being one of the central goals.

The idea that collaboration between agencies needs to be a central message of the vision statement was put forward by several people around the table.

It was suggested to include a reference in the mission statement to unmet needs as the underlying cause of crime and the importance of prevention.

The final text of the Strategy might distinguish between:

- A vision statement for Ireland;
- A statement of overall public sector commitment that underpins our approach to youth justice
- A contextual piece that balances children's rights and victims' rights; and
- A description of what the Strategy requires as society's contribution – role of family and of community.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles being linked to the UNCRC and the emphasis on having an evidence base was welcomed.

It was suggested that we look further at families in society and how we can incorporate their views into the Strategy. The diversity that is now present in Irish families should also be considered.

It was suggested that many of the points being raised in the meeting are mirrored in the development of Mental Health Strategy and that this could be useful to tap into.

Department of Education also provides a number of centres for children who have disengaged from education, which may also be useful to tap into in the context of the strategy.

It was suggested that an important consideration when developing the strategy is the question "could we defend these principles in the face of a public outcry about a serious crime?"

Several people emphasised the importance of including guiding principles focusing on those children and young people who do not usually benefit from Strategies like these. The Strategy should include a specific focus on young people who commit serious offences.

It was also suggested that the strategy should acknowledge the fact that the majority of children and families do not come into contact with the justice system and that the strategy refers to a comparatively small cohort of children and young people.

Another important element to be considered is the question of why some young people continue to offend despite receiving interventions. For some young people the existing interventions don't work and for some it is difficult to get them to engage at all.

It was also pointed out that although the system is good at keeping under 18s out of detention there is a spike in those being sent to prison once the young people hit 18 years of age.

We need to give consideration to how we develop the principles in a non-stigmatizing way.

It was suggested that there needs to be a focus on what we can do now for each child who finds themselves in contact with the justice system. Intervention should be provided at the earliest point possible to avoid young people becoming more and more at risk: as this is a Youth Justice Strategy, our focus should be on the Youth Justice System and how it can best intervene for the young people who are involved in it. Others around the table also felt that while this is a central priority, it is important also to widen the focus beyond the youth justice system, as the evidence suggests that early intervention is crucial in preventing young people from becoming involved in the youth justice system. The value of a Strategy, as distinct from normal business planning approaches, is not least to step back from the immediate pressures and take a long-term view of where our young people in the criminal justice system came from and what might have been effective in diverting them prior to any engagement with the system. On this basis, our focus needs to be on the child in the context of the specific family and of the specific community over the medium term. Empirical evidence as to key points in a child's life or family cycle where intervention could benefit, key factors or signals pointing to later offending behaviour, or key stages where existing services are weak, could allow us to make rational policy choices about how services are organised and on expenditure priorities. It is instructive, for example, that 40% of children in Oberstown in 2018 were known to the care services.

It was suggested that some principle around governance should be included, and also one around specialisation and training for those that will be implementing the Strategy.

4. Key Themes and Steering Group Schedule

MoS Stanton suggested adding "prevention" to early intervention theme. The Minister also suggested looking into engaging people from sporting and arts backgrounds in relation to the early intervention theme.

Children of Prisoners was suggested as something to be included as these children are more likely to end up in detention themselves.

It was also suggested that family support and after care are important to consider as many young people do very well in Oberstown and then they fall back into destructive behaviour when they leave because they are going back into a chaotic background.

5. Open Policy Forum

This is due to take place on the 8th of May and is the first step in terms of public consultation.

It was suggested that including a half page case study for each group might be helpful to focus the discussion.

6. Communication and Consultation

Everyone was asked to think about how we might best consult with different front line professionals.

It was suggested that the Law Society, the Bar Council and the Courts Service might be a good resource for contacting relevant members of the legal profession.

7. AOB

The Minister indicated to the group that at some point he may bring a discussion to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and perhaps a Memo for Government to inform colleagues on the work of the Steering Group.

He also asked for thoughts on how to get businesses involved, including through the Open Door initiative, to see what support they may be able to offer.

8. Action Points

IYJS will re-cast the Vision and Principles for the new strategy in light of the Steering Group discussion.

IYJS will arrange to meet with Tanya Ward before the next meeting of the Steering Group because she will not be in attendance, in particular to look at mapping the different stages of a child's life with regard to Prevention and Early Intervention.