

Youth Justice Strategy Steering Group Meeting 17 April 2019

In attendance:

Minister of State David Stanton TD	
Deaglán Ó Briain	IYJS, D. Justice and Equality
Brendan Sheehy	IYJS, D. Justice and Equality
Tony O'Donovan	IYJS, Department of Children and Youth Affairs
Brian Dack	Probation Service
Martin Shiel	Department of Education and Skills
Dr Sean Redmond	University of Limerick
Eddie Darcy	Solas
Berni Donovan	Tusla
Siobhan Purcell	An Garda Síochána
Mary Cunningham	National Youth Council of Ireland
Sinéad Murphy (Secretary)	IYJS, D. Justice and Equality
Kevin Stewart	IYJS, D. 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
Pat Bergin	Director, Oberstown Children Detention Campus
Michael Murchan	Department of Health
Collette Quinn	An Garda Síochána
Tanya Ward	Childrens Rights Alliance

1. Introduction

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. Revised Vision Statement and Principles

Issues raised on this were

Importance of including reference in the Principles to the effect of offending behaviour on society.

Importance of a reference to the best interests of children as this is included in most other strategies that focus on children.

4. Prevention and Early Intervention

Brendan introduced a flow chart which shows some of the principal different actors that are involved providing services and supports to children and families. It was suggested that as the Youth Justice Strategy will be linked to BOBF this should be shown on the chart. It was also suggested that Homelessness needed to be considered as an element in the coordination of services.

There was some discussion on the potential for the use of existing frameworks for coordination of services. It was apparent from the discussion that the coordination of interagency efforts will need some further development in the Strategic Objectives in the strategy.

Deaglán introduced the discussion Paper on Early Intervention. A wide ranging discussion ensued and some of the main points raised were-

Research Evidence: Available research noted the many risk factors related to young people becoming involved in crime and that contact with the youth justice system at a young age appears to have a damaging effect in itself. While practitioners report being

able to predict from a young age who is *at risk*, there is an absence of empirical research evidence to support the hypotheses that certain risk factors, or a combination of factors, are predictive.

Types of Early Interventions: Looking at the history of some serious offenders, many have an experience of exclusion and various alternative provision and which may have had a negative impact. For this reason, early intervention needs to be as mainstream as possible. The interventions that are currently available have not worked for many of the young people who come in contact with the Justice system. Some of the interventions are relatively short-term and these do not seem to work for many young people as they have such complex needs. It was suggested that interventions need to make a long-term commitment to the young person, although it was also queried whether there was any research which shows how such longer term interventions actually work.

School Attendance History:

There was discussion on possible links between detention in Oberstown and having been on reduced timetable in school. Early school leaving can be seen across all referrals to Oberstown, although the position in relation to the impact of reduced hours is not so clear.

Learning and Support Issues:

It was suggested that there is a need to look closer at why some young people find it so difficult to learn in a formal setting.

In relation to resources it was suggested that spending needs to be considered at a “whole of government” level to prioritise education and support for those at risk. Resources need to be drawn together and all focused on the needs of the child.

It was noted that there is currently a review of the out-of-school provision happening in the Department of Education and many of the same issues are being reported back to the Department as are being mentioned in the meeting.

The goal of the Department is to ensure that out of school provision is a last resort but if needed is a viable alternative, and the governance of this provision will be reviewed as part of the current review.

Balance of Mainstream and Specialised Services: It was suggested that while it is desirable for mainstream services to engage effectively with everyone, this should be balanced against the fact that many of the children at greatest disadvantage have high levels of complex needs. This is illustrated in relation to young people who leave special care but don't have services that are tailored to their needs anymore. They may go back to mainstream but begin to struggle again. Engagement is very good while in special care because the provision is more tailored to individual needs.

Community Programmes and Wraparound Services

Minister Stanton referred to the importance of the benefits that Arts, Music etc. can have in terms of engaging young people in different forms of learning. He cited examples (East Cork Music Project) where people had engaged and developed their abilities but had not been able to do so in the formal education system.

St Ultan's project early years service (Cherry Orchard) was suggested as a useful example of a good wraparound service.

It was acknowledged that the Discussion Paper included some disruptive thinking, in a positive way, and tried to look more directly at how we address the situation of children living in

disadvantage. Such an approach raises questions about the alignment and possible re-design of services.

It was suggested that public administration should be designed to create a coherent and integrated service, which, hopefully will come out of the finished Strategy. There was discussion that different funding streams having different reporting requirements and this can lead to inconsistency and difficulties in meeting requirements for community / NGOs, and affect the coherence of services.

Deaglán summarised that the new Strategy will need to outline the key issues to be addressed in Early Intervention and set out some real options for the Government to consider.

5. Open Policy Forum

An update was provided on preparations for the Open policy Forum scheduled for 8 May.

6. Next meeting

Scheduled for 12 June.