

Executive Summary of the Report on the Implementation of the National Youth Justice Strategy 2008 - 2010

Overview

The National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010 was launched in March 2008 and set challenging goals and objectives across a range of responsibilities of the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS). The IYJS aims to improve the delivery of youth justice services and to reduce youth offending. The more significant challenges were to bring about a modern and integrated youth justice system; to facilitate the implementation of the Children Act, 2001 (as amended); to ensure that the programmes provided are effective; and to achieve the best possible outcomes for children in trouble with the law and who come into contact with the youth justice system.

The Strategy was progressed at a national level by the National Youth Justice Oversight Group which was established to facilitate the cross-agency collaboration required. The Group was chaired by the Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and comprised of members of key stakeholders who met on a quarterly basis to monitor progress of the Strategy and discuss issues arising. The Group was committed under the strategy to report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.

The Strategy set out key actions and commitments for each of the stakeholders i.e.; Criminal Justice agencies, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), the HSE, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht affairs, the Children's Act Advisory Board (CAAB) and other relevant Departments under 5 High Level Goals: -

1. To provide leadership and build public confidence in the youth justice system;
2. To work to reduce offending by diverting young people away from offending behaviour;
3. To promote greater use of community sanctions and initiatives to deal with young people who offend;
4. To provide a safe and secure environment for detained children that will assist their early re-integration into the community;
5. To strengthen and develop information and data sources in the youth justice system to support more effective policies and services.

Progress made

The National Youth Justice Oversight Group and the associated Liaison Officer Group ensured progress was made in the implementation of the Strategy. Considerable effort has been made by all stakeholders to progress the Strategy with the majority of actions now completed. There were 74 objectives contained in the Strategy and over 90% of these were achieved. Progress has been made on the remaining items and they are being dealt

with on an ongoing basis. The net effect of this combined effort has been to develop a more co-ordinated strategic approach, make better use of existing resources, create positive working relationships amongst stakeholders and deliver better outcomes for children in trouble with the law and for the community in general.

Snapshot of progress under Strategy

- Implementation of the National Youth Justice Strategy with over 90% of objectives achieved and remainder being progressed.
- Full implementation of the provisions of the Children Act, 2001 (as amended) in 2007.
- Garda Youth Diversion Projects: A shift in focus towards ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the services provided by working with Garda management and implementing the findings of a baseline analysis of the projects.
- Expanding the use of Community Sanctions nationwide and working with the Courts Service and Probation Service to further increase their availability.
- An increase in resources such as 3 extra Judges for the Children's Court with specific training rolled out to the Judiciary. An extra 28 Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers appointed between 2007-2011.
- Progression of design and planning of National Children Detention Facilities in Oberstown, Lusk, Co. Dublin and in April 2012 IYJS secured capital funding for completion of the project in 2015.
- A commitment to end the practice of detaining 16/17 year old males in St. Patrick's Institution. From 2nd May 2012, 16 year olds remanded or sentenced by the Courts are now sent to Oberstown and when the new facilities completed no children will be detained in St. Patrick's Institution.
- Implementation of a number of steps towards integrating existing structures and improving the outcomes for children being detained in the schools. New policies for safeguarding, child protection, staff vetting & HIQA inspections introduced.

Statistical outcomes

- Number of children participating in Garda Youth Diversion Projects increased by 23% between 2008/2010, due to capacity improvements.
- Number of children given an informal (unsupervised) caution under the Garda Diversion Programme decreased by 21% between 2008/2010.
- Number of children given a formal (JLO supervised) caution under the Garda Diversion Programme decreased by 10% between 2008/2010.
- Number of children appearing before Children Court has remained fairly stable over period 2008/2010.
- Number of children being placed in children detention schools had decreased steadily, between 2008 and 2010 average annual occupancy dropped from 46 to 34.

Priorities going forward

As the timeframe for the Strategy has now expired, it is time to review the progress made, re-examine priorities and plan the future direction of youth justice policy. Work is ongoing to implement the small number of outstanding objectives. IYJS is currently in the process of developing a follow up National Youth Justice Strategy under the umbrella of the National Children's & Young Person's Policy Framework currently being developed by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Key suggestions for the next Strategy:

- Continue to progress the formalising of youth justice teams.
- Continue with the capacity-building change management programme of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects.
- Implement recommendations of the Young Persons Probation Projects baseline analysis report in conjunction with the Probation Service.
- Complete the new national children detention facilities in Oberstown scheduled for completion in 2015.
- Progress and finalise the integration process/reforms in the Detention Schools.
- Continue the Implementation of the Education Strategy in Detention Schools.
- Continue with training on standardised risk assessment amongst practitioners.
- Agree data sharing protocols with stakeholders for sharing of personal information.
- Strengthen and develop data and information sources in the youth justice system.
- Further examine the emerging patterns of offending behaviour and design more effective interventions.
- Evaluate performance of the interventions.

Conclusion

We can now say that a) we know more about the nature of the youth crime problem and this has allowed us to be more data driven and evidence informed, b) this has corresponded with a falling detected youth crime rate, c) these positive changes have occurred at the same time as Ireland's relatively low level of youth detention has also experienced further downward trends and d) this correlates with a more effective use of money and offers the prospect of better outcomes for children and communities.



Irish Youth Justice Service

Seirbhís na hÉireann um Cheartas i leith an Aosa Óig