



An tSeirbhís Phromhaidh
The Probation Service

Probation Service Statement of Strategy 2024–26

Changing Lives in Our
Communities for Safer Futures

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Foreword by Director

I am pleased to present the Probation Service Statement of Strategy 2024-2026 which seeks to realise our vision for 'safer and more inclusive communities where offending and its causes are addressed'.

In this plan, we outline five areas of strategic focus with associated goals required to advance our organisation over the next three years, enabling us to fully contribute within an ever evolving criminal justice system.

This strategy represents a new strategic direction for the Probation Service: one that builds on the great work that is already happening, one that is informed by evidence, and, most importantly, one that innovates to find new and alternative ways of working to achieve better outcomes for our clients and safety in our communities. It has been prepared in the context of the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future* and it outlines our unique and important role in enhancing public safety and supporting the delivery of the *Department of Justice Strategy 2024-2026*.

At its core, the work of the Probation Service is centred on a fundamental belief in people's capacity to change. As probation officers, we believe that our clients must accept responsibility for their behaviour and where possible, make good on the harm they have caused through crime. All aspects of our work are focused on motivating clients to change their behaviour, helping them sustain their commitment to change and facilitating improved opportunities for change.

The national delivery of supervised community sanctions is the cornerstone of our work, and is essential to the delivery of justice in the courts. Central to our strategy is our ambition to enhance

our effectiveness to manage these sanctions. We will continue to invest in research and training to ensure our targeted interventions and rehabilitation programmes are evidence-informed in order to reduce reoffending by producing the best possible outcomes for clients and wider communities.

The implementation of the Irish Probation Framework (IPF), a bespoke model of probation practice designed for the Irish context, is a key deliverable of this strategy and will be essential to delivering this ambition. The IPF is underpinned by research and aims to strengthen the positive impact of our work by ensuring we are consistent, effective and accountable. It also supports our commitment to strengthening our victim-sensitive approach to criminal offending by further embedding the principles of restorative justice in our day-to-day practice with clients.

Over the next three years, the Probation Service will face many challenges with rising numbers of court referrals; sustained pressure on prison capacity; changing complexity of needs among clients; rising cost of living costs, and a restrictive labour market. It is more important than ever that we align fully with justice partners and beyond to keep our communities safe and deliver fair and equal access to justice. We have made significant strides in consolidating our multi-agency work over recent years and our close relationships with the Department of Justice, the Irish Prison Service, the Judiciary, the Courts Service and An Garda Síochána remain critical into the future.

We understand that in order to support sustainable change and reduce reoffending, we must also target the underlying causes of crime. For this reason, we will continue to build capacity in the area of social inclusion and play our part in helping individuals overcome inequalities by challenging stigmatisation and removing barriers to participation in society. We will continue to leverage the innovation, skills and expertise of the Community Based Organisations we fund, benefitting from their unique perspective in support of achieving our shared aims.

As Director of the Service, I recognise that our highly skilled and passionate staff remain our most important asset and are critical to the success of this strategy. Continued investment in training and development, future-focused workforce planning and modernising our data systems and ICT capabilities is critical to creating a dynamic work environment. We remain committed to working in partnership with colleagues to foster a positive work culture that empowers, innovates and inspires inclusion.

Finally, the Statement of Strategy has been prepared through extensive consultation with staff and stakeholders, including the Department of Justice, the Irish Prison Service, Community Based Organisations, people with lived experience of the criminal justice system and many more. I am very grateful for the inputs provided which have shaped our thinking, and am pleased that the result is a Statement of Strategy with a high level of purpose, energy and ambition.



Mark Wilson
Director



The Work of the Probation Service

The Probation Service is part of the Department of Justice and plays a vital role in making our communities safer by working to reduce reoffending resulting in fewer victims of crime.

The Service contributes to this by:

Ensuring that court ordered supervision is implemented in a way that protects the public, holds people to account, and supports rehabilitation.



Delivering effective interventions with individuals subject to community sanctions, to reduce the risks associated with offending and support their rehabilitation and reintegration.



Delivering opportunities for people to make good on the harm caused by crime through reparation work and restorative justice.



The work of the Probation Service is often challenging and complex and cannot be carried out in isolation.

We work collaboratively with our justice partners, statutory partners, and alongside wider stakeholders in the community and voluntary sector.



Our work incorporates:

Providing reports to assist the courts in sentencing.



Supervising those subject to community sanctions (adults and children).



Providing professional, effective and evidenced informed interventions.



Working with partner organisations to provide targeted responses to crime and associated risks, particularly with the Irish Prison Service, An Garda Síochána and the Courts Service.



Addressing the harm caused from offending behaviours.



Working with victims of crime through our Restorative Justice & Victims Services Unit.



Working with prisoners in custody and through the transition to community supervision.



Probation Officers are professionally trained to work with people who have been referred to the Service, to challenge and motivate them, and ultimately encourage them to change their behaviour to reduce reoffending. They do this through the development of positive, purposeful and focused professional relationships, within clear role boundaries, using the skills and interventions that have been demonstrated to be effective. They have expert skills in the assessment and management of risk and play a unique role in the justice system by overseeing the robust management of supervised community sanctions and measures.

With over 35 community-based offices nationwide, the Probation Service is a national service, delivered locally, providing services to courts, custodial institutions and communities across the country.

On any one day, the Probation Service is managing in excess of **12,000 offenders in the community and working with up to 2,000 prisoners in custody.**

Of those supervised in the community, some **1,700 are serving post release supervision orders¹.**

¹ Based on Probation Service 2024 Q1 Point in Time Statistics (1st April)

Our Mission, Vision & Values

Our Vision:

Safer and more inclusive communities where offending and its causes are addressed.



Our Mission:

Delivering high quality supervised community sanctions and measures for those referred by the Justice system to enable positive change in the pursuit of community safety.



Our Values:

- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Compassion
- Empowerment
- Inclusivity



Our fundamental values are core to our work and are the foundation of all our efforts. They are guided by the *Council of Europe Probation Rules* and our *Public Sector Duty*, both of which are grounded in principles of human rights and equality.

These values guide our interactions with all those with whom we engage through our work, in particular clients, colleagues and community partners. These obligations are consistent with our vision and mission and are reflected in our strategic goals and the associated actions across all directorates.

Our Operating Context

The Probation Service, as part of the Department of Justice, is an integral part of the broader Criminal Justice System.

The Probation Service provides a unique contribution through the management and rehabilitation of people referred to the Service, by the courts or on release from custody.

Our work is informed through strategic alignment and collaboration with a range of organisations from statutory, voluntary and community settings. As part of the Department of Justice, our priorities and goals are clearly aligned to the *Department of Justice Strategy 2024-2026*, the *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-27*, the *Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Policy 2022-24* and the *Department of Justice Policy Paper on Restorative Justice 2023*. Likewise, our objectives and aims support of the work of the newly established statutory agency, Cuan, in delivering *Zero Tolerance; the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-based Violence 2022-26*. Equally the *Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024* will, amongst a range of other developments, enable the national roll-out of the Community Safety Partnership model, a model that is welcomed by the Service.

Challenges faced by our client group include addiction, homelessness, mental health, and access to training and employment. In responding to these needs the Service will remain committed to supporting *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery*, the National Drugs Strategy 2017-25; *Sharing the Vision*, mental health strategy, 2020-30, the *High Level Task Force for Mental Health and Addiction* report 2022; a variety of measures to improve outcomes for those who are homeless; and the forthcoming Department of Justice *Building Pathways Together*, employment strategy 2024-26.

Additionally the Service is cognisant of the recommendations of the *Irish Travellers' Access to Justice* Report 2022; and the opportunities presenting with the inclusion of persons with a criminal history under the Department of Rural and Community Development's *Social Inclusion Activation Programme* (SICAP) 2024-28.



Consultation factors:

In developing this strategy, we undertook a review of our operating context to identify the internal and external factors that could significantly impact upon the future of the Probation Service over the next few years.

- *External issues* such as global instability, political uncertainty, rising costs of living, globalisation, changes in societal demographics, full national employment, climate action and the impact of emerging technologies were raised as areas for consideration.
- *Internal issues* such as the increase in court referrals, complex client needs, crime trends, measurement of outcomes, rising prison population, communication with key stakeholders, public awareness, accessing data, GDPR compliance, training and development, managing performance, retention and recruitment, and digital innovation were highlighted as areas for review.



Legislative Framework:

The Probation Service works within a legislative framework which places obligations and responsibilities on how we carry out our work (see Appendix B for list of relevant legislation). The Probation Service will continue to support the advancement of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014, which will facilitate the effective and efficient use of community sanctions by the courts.



Public Sector Duty:

In line with our obligations under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Probation Service is committed to ensuring our policies, procedures and services comply with requirements in the areas of human rights and equality. Section 42 of that Act establishes a positive duty on public bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of all those with whom they engage. This incorporates our staff, clients and those with whom we engage through our work. These obligations are consistent with our values and our commitment to meeting them is reflected in our strategic goals.



Managing and Measuring Performance:

We are conscious that through the lifetime of this Strategy our operating environment is likely to change which will require us to adapt and reprioritise, without losing sight of our key goals and responsibilities. Performance and achievement of this Strategy will be reported through the Probation Service Annual Reports and Performance and Oversight Agreements with the Department of Justice. These annual reports set out achievement against this published Strategic Plan.



Developing Our Strategy

This Strategy Statement was developed following an extensive consultation process involving our staff, clients, the public and a wide range of stakeholders.

The process commenced in November 2023 and ran for a period of four months. In our

effort to ensure transparency and consistency throughout the process, the Service worked with an independent consultancy firm to oversee stakeholder consultation. We also sought to extend our reach by using digital platforms and online surveys to gather feedback and insights from a diverse range of stakeholders.

Participation and feedback from 278 stakeholders

13 workshops involving
192 stakeholders

192



78 survey
submissions

78



8 written letters
submissions

8



How we consulted with our stakeholders:

Issued invitations for written submissions to more than 130 key stakeholders including our partners across the wider justice sector, academia, civil society, and government departments and agencies.



Organised 8 interactive workshops with staff in addition to an on-line survey.



Conducted 2 half-day consultation workshops with Community Based Organisations in addition to requesting written feedback via online survey.



Delivered 2 interactive consultation workshops for criminal justice partners in addition to written feedback via online survey.



Facilitated 2 in-person consultation workshops with people with lived experience of the Probation Service and wider criminal justice system.



Carried out a public consultation process via the Gov.ie consultation website and promotion across social media platforms.



The Probation Service would like to thank all our staff, clients and stakeholders for taking the time to provide their valuable contributions and submissions to the development of this Strategy. A full list of participating organisations can be seen in Appendix C

Our 5 Strategic Pillars

Our Strategic Plan sets out five key pillars that embody the strategic focus of the Service over the next 3 years.

Aligned to each strategic pillar are a number of interconnected high-level goals.



Pillar 1:
**Enhancing
Community
Safety**

1



Pillar 2:
**Empowering
Our Staff**

2



Pillar 3:
**Building
Collaboration
and
Engagement**

3

These goals will direct our programme of work and drive the operational activities that we will need to progress in our annual work plans.



Pillar 4:
**Enabling
Social
Inclusion**

4



Pillar 5:
**Future-
proofing
Our Service**

5

Pillar 1:

Enhancing Community Safety



1

In supporting desistance, strengthen the quality of community based supervision in response to changes in or emerging crime trends, client risk and need.

2

In keeping with the proposed Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill, revise and extend the range of community sanctions and measures that are public safety focused, client orientated and victim sensitive.

3

Strengthen and further develop our approach to through-care for those subject to Probation Service supervision on release from prison and Oberstown Children Detention Centre.

4

Align and strengthen our multi-agency work processes, prioritising risk of harm.

Outcome:

Community sanctions and measures managed through the provision of effective client assessment and supervision enabling positive change, fewer victims and safer communities.

Pillar 2:

Empowering Our Staff



1

Fully embed our evidence-informed model of client supervision, the Irish Probation Framework, to ensure we operate consistently, effectively and to the highest professional standards across all aspects of our work.

2

Prioritise a positive working environment, building resilience and promoting positive measures to make us an employer of choice.

3

Build capacity through resource planning, good governance and innovation that is responsive to changing needs, embracing diversity and lived experience.

4

Broaden opportunities for staff development and engagement, encouraging innovation and creativity in the workplace.

Outcome:

A high-performing organisation committed to the continuous professional development and well-being of all staff in delivering a high quality public service.

Pillar 3:

Building Collaboration and Engagement



1

Actively engage with the Department of Justice and criminal justice partners to maximise the effectiveness of supervised community sanctions and measures in achieving a safer and fairer Ireland.

2

Work with our network of community based organisations to further develop and deliver dynamic services that are responsive to the needs of a modern probation service.

3

As a learning organisation, strengthen our national and international partnerships to remain at the forefront of effective probation practice when working with adults and children.

4

Develop an enabling environment that supports collaboration and information exchange with key partners to advance the work of the Service.

Outcome:

Purposeful, aligned partnerships with our stakeholders that maximise our ability to achieve our mission and vision.

Pillar 4:

Enabling Social Inclusion



1

Ensure the Probation Service is accessible and responsive to the needs and circumstances of our diverse clients.

2

Develop mechanisms to embed lived experience, victim and community voices to inform and enrich our work.

3

Establish opportunities and pathways to mainstream services in the community and advocate for the inclusion of our clients in all relevant national strategies.

4

Take positive action to meet our Public Sector Duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect the human rights of clients and staff in a meaningful way.

Outcome:

In supporting desistance, a human rights-led approach to our work that is focused on promoting social inclusion and equal access to opportunities and services.

Pillar 5:

Future-proofing Our Service



1

Become a more digitally-enabled service through the delivery of innovative, secure and scalable digital solutions that will maximise efficiency and deliver user-friendly services to clients, staff and the wider public.

2

Maximise awareness and understanding of the Probation Service and the important impact of our work via the delivery of dynamic high-impact communications strategies with our staff, stakeholders and the general public.

3

Build a data-driven and research culture that supports evidence-informed practice, effective decision-making and enhanced collaboration with criminal justice agencies and other partners.

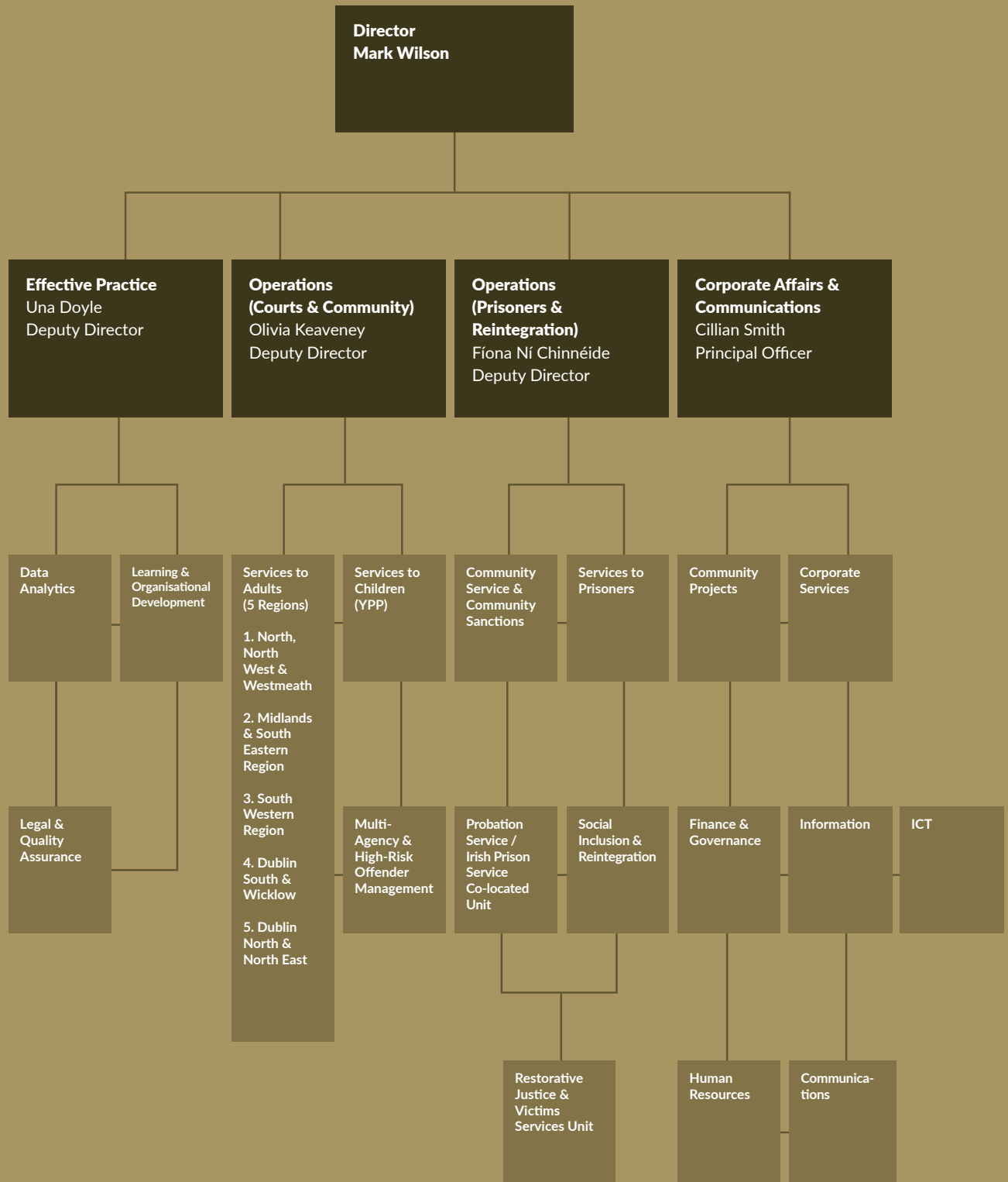
4

Advance our commitment to climate action through the delivery of sustainability initiatives which minimise our environmental impact and embed new ways of working that reduce energy usage and costs.

Outcome:

A respected, agile and climate-conscious organisation with a robust digital and data infrastructure that delivers enhanced services, supports innovation and improves effectiveness in a cohesive and holistic manner.

Appendix A: Organisational Chart



Appendix B:

Legislative & Regulatory Framework

The work of the Probation Service is an integral part of the criminal justice response to those who commit offences and is defined and imposed by law. The Probation of Offenders Act (1907) provides for statutory supervision in the community and is the foundation for probation work in Ireland. This Act is augmented by other legislation, with the most relevant outlined below:

Probation

- Probation of Offenders Act 1907
- Criminal Justice (Administration) Act 1914 Community Service
- Criminal Justice (Community Service) Act 1983 (as amended)
- Criminal Justice (Community Service) (Amendment) Act 2011

Temporary Release (supervised) and Parole

- Criminal Justice Act 1960 (as amended)
- Criminal Justice (Temporary Release of Prisoners) Act 2003
- Parole Act 2019

Prisoners

- Transfer of Sentenced Persons Act, 1995
- Transfer of Sentenced Persons (Amendment) Act, 1997
- Criminal Justice (Mutual Recognition of Custodial Sentences) Act 2023, transposing EU Framework Decision 2008/909

Suspended Sentences (supervised)

- Criminal Justice Act 2006
- Criminal Justice (Suspended Sentences of Imprisonment) Act 2017

Transfer of Supervision

- Criminal Justice (Mutual Recognition of Probation Judgements and Decisions) Act, 2019 transposing EU Framework Decision 2008/947

Children YPP

- Children Act 2001 (as amended)

Sex Offenders

- Sex Offenders Act 2001
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017
- Sex Offenders Amendment Act 2023

Misuse of Drugs

- Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 (as amended)
- Criminal Justice (Psychoactive Substances) Act 2010
- Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Act 2017

Fine default alternatives

- Fines Act 2010
- Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014

Victims

- Section 5, Criminal Justice Act 1993 (as amended)
- Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017, which transposed EU Directive on Victims' Rights 2012/29/EU into national law.

Spent convictions

- Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016
- Section 258 of the Children Act 2001

Data Protection

- Freedom of Information Act 1997
- Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act 2003
- Data Protection Act 1988
- Data Protection Act 2018, transposing the Law Enforcement Directive (EU) 2016/680)

Electronic Monitoring

- Section 112 Criminal Justice Act 2006 (only S. 112(b) commenced to date)

Bail and EM

- Criminal Justice Act 2007 (as amended) – Sections 11, 12 and 13
- Bail Act 1997 (as amended)

In addition to the legislation probation practice is guided by National and International Rules and Recommendations:

- Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Probation Rules
- Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec (2017)3 on the European Rules on community sanctions and measures
- Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)11 on the European Rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measure
- Council of Europe Guidelines regarding recruitment, selection, education, training and professional development of prison and probation staff (2019)
- Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning restorative justice in criminal matters
- Council of Europe Guidelines for prison and probation services regarding radicalisation and violent extremism (2016).

- Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (Victim Rights Directive)
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (The Tokyo Rules) 1990
- United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) 2010
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules) 1985
- CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers (2010)
- Victims Charter (<https://www.victimscharter.ie/>)

Appendix C: Contributing Organisations

Contributions were received from the following organisations as part of the consultation process for the development of the Probation Service Statement of Strategy 2024-26.


1) An Garda Síochána	20) Irish Prison Service
2) Canal House	21) Le Chéile Mentoring
3) Candle Community Trust	22) Maynooth University
4) Céim ar Chéim	23) Mental Health Reform
5) Coolmine Therapeutic Community	24) Office of the Inspector of Prisons
6) Cornmarket Project Wexford	25) PACE
7) Cox's Demesne	26) PALLS
8) Daughters of Charity Community Services CLG	27) Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
9) Deonach	28) Probation Board for Northern Ireland
10) Department of Education	29) Restorative Justice Services
11) Department of Justice	30) Safe Ireland
12) Department of Rural and Community Development	31) SAOL
13) Dóchas don Óige	32) Southill Outreach
14) Garda Síochána Inspectorate	33) Stepping Out Programme
15) Grow Mental Health	34) The Alternative Project
16) HSE Social Inclusion Unit	35) Tivoli
17) IASIO	36) Treo Port Lairge CLG
18) Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW)	37) Tus Nua (DePaul Ireland)
19) Irish Penal Reform Trust	38) Tusla - Child and Family Agency
	39) WHAD



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