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Foreword

As the leaders of our various organisations, we are pleased to publish this first ever Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy.

The document builds upon the strong principles and foundations of collaborative working laid by the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee since our establishment in 2015. The Committee has operated on an ad hoc basis up to now but we believe the time is now right to formalise our work in this strategy which has been developed in a partnership approach between all of the bodies operating in the criminal justice sector. Our objective is to strengthen and improve how we work together, with a particular focus in this first strategy on improving the experience of those who come into contact with the criminal justice system and how we communicate about the work we do. Importantly the document acknowledges and safeguards the independence from Government of some key bodies and charts a way to work together more effectively while respecting this important principle.

In preparing the Strategy we consulted with all elements of the system, with our colleagues across Government, with system users and, most importantly, with victims of crime and the general public we all serve.

What we discovered in talking to people is not surprising - the criminal justice system in Ireland can be seen as daunting, inaccessible and is often difficult to understand for those using it. The ‘system’ does not communicate with a unified voice to victims, witnesses, suspects/people accused or convicted of a crime and does not always seem to be cohesive or efficient.

Our shared commitment, as set out in this Strategy, is to work together to remedy these issues.

We will work to improve what can be a difficult or confusing experience for people who come into contact with the criminal justice system and to strengthen strategic and authentic collaboration between agencies. We will make greater use of data as a driver of system change, to improve workforce planning and capability across our organisations, and to increase understanding of how the criminal justice system works in Ireland.

While it is inevitable that the system is complicated, and it is essential that some agencies operate independently from others, we will work towards a more cohesive criminal justice system. We want a victim-centred system with an innovative and open culture, where people go the extra mile to solve problems creatively and collaboratively, and where policy development is based on consultation, evidence and data.

In doing so, we believe we can deliver a joined-up criminal justice system that protects human rights, builds public confidence and trust, and works together to improve efficiency and the experience of those who rely on us to deliver a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland.

Importantly, this Strategy is supported by an Implementation Plan which sets out in detail the actions, responsibilities and timeframes required to deliver this vision.

We look forward to working closely together to lead, drive and monitor the implementation of this Strategy.
Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

**VISION**

A joined-up criminal justice system that protects human rights, builds public confidence and trust, and works together to improve efficiency and the experience of stakeholders to support a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland.

**MISSION**

We will:

- Prioritise actions to support our shared commitment to prevent and respond to crime and to reduce harm
- Work to ensure that good quality, timely information is provided to users and that they are dealt with through fairness, dignity and respect at all stages; and
- Build an innovative culture, embedding system-wide thinking, collaborative working and evidence based decision making.

**VALUES & Guiding Principles**

- Working together collaboratively
- Integrity & Accountability
- Evidence-based
- Innovative
- Open and Engaged
Summary of Strategic Pillars

1. **STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC COLLABORATION**
   - Work together to address cross-cutting strategic policy issues
   - Drive digitisation to streamline service delivery
   - Develop a strong understanding of the causes of delays in the system and how they can be addressed
   - Identify and implement new ways of working to increase operational efficiencies across the system

2. **IMPROVING USER EXPERIENCE**
   - Streamline and improve our criminal justice system to deliver a more effective system for all
   - Embed a victim-centred approach across the system
   - Ensure that all those engaged in the system have effective support
   - Strengthen and enhance a multi-agency approach to tackle reoffending

3. **DATA AS A DRIVER**
   - Support a data culture to ensure an evidence-based approach to policy making
   - Use research, analysis and data to identify new and emerging trends.
   - Ensure better management and use of knowledge, data and research through the ability to link criminal justice data sets

4. **BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPABILITY**
   - Support and develop a diverse, empathetic, and trauma-informed workforce
   - Increase inter-agency understanding and support our staff to innovate and think beyond organisational boundaries

5. **INCREASING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING**
   - Increase public awareness and understanding of the criminal justice system
   - Develop a structured form of engagement with our key stakeholders to support the development of services and the formulation of policy
   - Develop consistency in our communications with the public
Background and Context

Criminal Justice Strategic Committee

The Criminal Justice Strategic Committee was established in 2015 to coordinate activities and processes across the criminal justice system in order to align and use resources to best effect and to improve outcomes for the public. The Committee is chaired by the Department of Justice and comprises the Heads of the independent organisations in the sector: An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service, Forensic Science Ireland, Irish Prison Service, Legal Aid Board, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the Probation Service.

The Committee meets quarterly to discuss and address cross-cutting issues that affect the entire criminal justice system. The work of the Committee is carried out by a number of Working Groups established to focus on specific issues of sectoral importance. Since the establishment of the Committee, the sectoral organisations have successfully collaborated on a number of important strategic projects in the areas of offender management, data sharing and in gaining system-wide efficiencies. This Strategy aims to build upon and further embed this whole-of-sector, collaborative approach.

Going forward, the Committee will oversee the implementation of this Strategy.

The Criminal Justice Sector in Ireland

The Irish criminal justice sector is a complex network of independent yet interdependent organisations. While each organisation operates independently to fulfil its own function, collectively they are all responsible for the administration of criminal justice in Ireland. As a result, it is useful to think of the criminal justice sector as a single system where changes made in one (operationally independent) part may impact heavily on another.

As a system, the various criminal justice organisations operate independently to prevent and reduce crime and harm, reduce re-offending and build safer communities. More specifically, the criminal justice sector is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences and the management of offenders both in prison and in the community.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions plays a vital role in the criminal justice system, which is reflected in this Strategy. However, the Office is entirely independent of the Government Department/Agency structure, which means that its involvement in the implementation of certain actions falling from this Strategy would not be appropriate.

The complexity of the sector, as highlighted above, provides a particular challenge in delivering a joined-up approach to cross-cutting sectoral issues. This Strategy aims to support a coherent, collaborative, whole-of-sector approach to the
The Criminal Justice Sector in Ireland

**An Garda Síochána:** Ireland's police service is responsible for crime prevention, detection and investigation as well as the prosecution of minor offences.

**Forensic Science Ireland:** Responsible for analysing samples submitted from crime scenes, providing expert evidence in criminal trials and overseeing Ireland’s DNA database.

**The Department of Justice:** Sets the strategic direction for a large part of the criminal justice sector; enables and supports the criminal justice organisations to work together collaboratively.

**The Courts Service:** Responsible for the management of Courts, supporting judges, providing information on the courts system to the public and providing court buildings and facilities for court users.

**The Probation Service:** Works with offenders, in prison and the community, to reduce their offending. The Probation Service also manages community service orders and provides assessment reports to the Courts, the Parole Board and the Irish Prison Service in relation to offenders it works with.

**Legal Aid Board:** Responsible for the administration of three non-statutory criminal legal aid schemes; legal representation for those detained by Gardaí for certain offences, certain High Court and Supreme Court applications and in relation to specified Criminal Asset Bureau (CAB) investigations.

**Irish Prison Service:** Responsible for the safe and secure custody of persons held on remand and those sentenced to prison. It also supports offender care and rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

**Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions:** Responsible for the direction and supervision of public prosecutions and related criminal matters. The Office is entirely independent of the Government Department/Agency structure.
delivery of a more accessible, understandable and joined-up service that meets the needs of system users as well as the wider community.

**Why a Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy?**

The purpose of this first ever Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy is to develop a shared vision for a more joined-up criminal justice system, where criminal justice organisations think beyond organisational boundaries when making decisions. The Strategy will provide a framework to further embed a culture of collaborative working within the criminal justice organisations, drive innovation and increase efficiencies across the system, leading to better outcomes for those who engage with the criminal justice system directly, and for the public more widely.

The Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy 2022 – 2024 has an accompanying Implementation Plan which highlights the work programme and actions to be monitored throughout the lifetime of the Strategy. These are intended to be living documents, which will be reviewed regularly by the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee. This will enable the reprioritisation of activity in a flexible and responsive way to meet the changing needs of our environment.

This Strategy will set the direction of travel for the criminal justice sector in Ireland for the future. For the first time ever, we present a coherent approach to criminal justice, overseen by a common governance framework. This Strategy will be implemented in the context of a number of ongoing national strategies and policies.

**Broader Policy Context and Strategy Alignment**

The development and implementation of this strategy takes place within the context of a number of other national policies and initiatives related to building safer communities, the prevention of crime and the reduction of harm.

For example, collaborative work continues in the area of multi-agency offender management where a new oversight and governance structure is being established to coordinate and align offender management programmes, including Sex Offenders, Prolific Offenders, and Life Sentenced Prisoners.

We are also currently developing and piloting a community safety policy, underpinned by the principle that community safety is not the responsibility of An Garda Síochána alone and involves other Government Departments and agencies, such as health, housing and social services. The community safety policy recognises that community safety is dependent on co-ordination and collaboration across Government Departments and Agencies, with strong leadership at national level and strong community engagement at local level.

This Sectoral Strategy will focus on actions to be carried out within the Irish criminal justice sector itself and will be rolled out against a backdrop of the large-scale transformation and reform that is already underway across the sector. This includes the rollout of A Policing Service for the Future in An Garda Síochána, the Courts Modernisation Programme and the ongoing Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024.

Efforts have also been made to align this strategy
and its actions with relevant national strategies, the current strategies of each criminal justice organisation, existing multi-agency strategies, commitments in the Programme for Government and other relevant reports. Primarily, these strategies and policies include:

- Supporting a Victim's Journey: A plan to help victims and vulnerable witnesses in sexual violence cases (O'Malley Report);
- The Youth Justice Strategy 2021 – 2027; and

Along with these policies there are also a range of other national strategies that relate to the priority actions identified in this Strategy. These include:

- National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021;
- National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021);
- Restorative Justice for Change Strategy;
- Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2022-2026); and the

As living documents, this Strategy and its Implementation Plan will continually be reviewed to ensure alignment with other relevant strategies and policies as they are agreed.

A Human Rights Focus

Our vision is a joined-up criminal justice system protecting human rights, maintaining public trust and working together to support safer communities. More information and clarity for the public, together with systemic improvements, consistent with human rights and procedural fairness, will positively impact on peoples’ experience of the system.

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, places a positive duty on all public bodies to eliminate discrimination, to protect human rights and promote equality of opportunity and treatment for all staff and service users.

This public sector duty places human rights and equality at the heart of the work we do and is therefore aligned with this Strategy’s Vision, Mission, Values and Guiding Principles. We will continue to work towards implementing and upholding this duty and will regularly report on this commitment.
How we developed the Strategy

The Criminal Justice Strategic Committee established a Working Group in late 2019 to develop a Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy.

A detailed consultation process took place in order to inform the Strategy’s development. The first consultation phase focused on hearing the views of those who work within, or closely with, the criminal justice sector. Four separate events were targeted at those working within the criminal justice organisations, other Government Departments and agencies, NGOs and civil society groups, and finally academia and legal practitioners. These consultations took place in February and March 2020, with over 100 individuals participating.

The second phase of the consultation process focused on hearing the voices of local communities and members of the public. This phase included three elements: a series of public consultation events, an online survey and a request for written submissions.

These public consultations took place in June and July 2020, with approximately 55 members of the public participating in three online interactive consultations. The online survey received over 575 responses and 40 written submissions were received.

Consultation findings have heavily informed the development of the Strategy and its Implementation Plan. While some suggestions that arose during the consultation process fall outside the scope of this particular Strategy, many of them are being addressed by other strategies and initiatives. For example, a community safety policy is currently being developed which will provide an additional formal mechanism for engagement with stakeholders outside the criminal justice system.

Reports on the findings from the consultations on this Strategy can be found on the Department of Justice’s website here: https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Publications
Our commitments to increased interoperability, digitisation of our services and a joined-up approach to data collection will facilitate better information sharing, and ultimately improve the experiences of people who interact with the criminal justice system.

How we will implement the Strategy

What are the critical factors for successful implementation?

Data Sharing

The principle of data sharing underpins core elements of this Strategy. Data is a key enabler for transparency, building trust and developing evidence-informed policy.

Our commitments to increased interoperability, digitisation of our services and a joined-up approach to data collection will facilitate better information sharing, and ultimately improve the experiences of people who interact with the criminal justice system. A more joined-up approach to data will also allow us to think more critically about how we can best reduce crime, increase safety, support victims and reduce re-offending.

A key enabler for sectoral data sharing is the Criminal Justice Operational Hub; an initiative coordinated by the Department of Justice to facilitate the automated sharing of data between the criminal justice agencies.

The Criminal Justice Operational Hub responds to the need for improved automation of information sharing across the Justice Sector and provides a centralised facility to allow for (i) data to be exchanged between the existing ICT systems in the criminal justice agencies and (ii) accessed in an anonymised format for the purposes of research and developing evidence based policy.

In this Strategy, we commit to developing a three year plan to support the further development of the Hub for this purpose.

Technology

Technology and ICT are key enablers in responding to the needs of system users, streamlining user journeys through the system and improving how criminal justice agencies interact with each other at an operational level.

We will continue to drive towards digital services across the sector by transforming our service delivery models and channels through the application of technology. Some key ongoing work in this area includes the development of the Criminal Justice Operational Hub, the Courts Modernisation Plan and the Department of Justice’s Information Management and Technology Strategy.

Leadership and Cultural Change

While the Department of Justice has a key leadership role in the implementation of this Strategy, strong leadership from the highest levels of each criminal justice organisation is required in order to break down organisational barriers, think systemically, and to further embed collaborative ways of working to deliver on the vision and mission of this Strategy.

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2 All sharing of data amongst criminal justice agencies will be conducted in accordance with all relevant legislation including the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Law Enforcement Directive (Directive 2016/680).
What are the key challenges, risks and barriers to implementation?

Economic Environment

It is expected that this Strategy will be implemented during a period of economic uncertainty and limited resources, largely brought about as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. At a time of financial uncertainty, the criminal justice sector will benefit from a more strategic approach to collaboration and a concerted effort to align resources, where possible.

Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences for all areas of Irish society. It has been a catalyst for positive change in the criminal justice system. New ways of working have been introduced during the pandemic; the reliance on paper-based systems has reduced, there has been an increase in the use of video link to the Courts, and the optimisation of online technology has also allowed prisoners and those on remand to maintain contact with their families during lockdown periods. We are committed to working together to maintain and build upon these innovations and operational efficiencies to ensure a fair and efficient criminal justice system.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also presented the criminal justice system with particular challenges as resources have been diverted to ensure our communities remain safe during this turbulent and challenging time. Public health guidelines and social distancing requirements make it difficult to hold criminal trials, causing delays and a growing backlog of cases in the system. In addition, face-to-face meetings with those on probation have also been curtailed. The problem of managing court backlogs and delays cannot be addressed from within organisational silos and requires strategic collaboration and a commitment to innovate across the sector.

Legacy IT Systems

Each criminal justice organisation has over time, developed its own IT infrastructure and systems which are not designed to interact or communicate with each other. This makes it difficult to share information and track the progress of individual cases through the system. In this Strategy, we commit to enabling criminal justice IT systems to talk to each other more effectively through a more joined-up approach to the development and modernisation of individual IT systems and the ongoing development of the Criminal Justice Operational Hub.

Monitoring & Implementation

The implementation of this Strategy will form the agenda and work programme for the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee in the coming period. This work will be supported by Subgroups of the Committee which will be established to monitor and assess the implementation of the actions outlined in each Pillar of the Strategy.

It is recognised that this Strategy will be implemented during a period of ongoing transformation across the sector, including the implementation of 'A Policing Service for the Future', the ongoing Courts Modernisation programme, and the longer term plans for sectoral Covid recovery. In order to support the implementation of this Strategy, we commit to establishing a cross-sectoral fund to support innovation and multi-agency collaborative projects across the sector.
The implementation of this Strategy will form the agenda and work programme for the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee in the coming period.

Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy Implementation Subgroups

Membership of each Subgroup, which will align with each pillar of the Strategy, will include representatives from the Department of Justice and the relevant criminal justice organisations. The Subgroups will:

- Monitor progress of all agreed actions and escalate issues as necessary to the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee;
- Oversee the output of any cross-sectoral working groups which may be established to carry out specific actions as outlined in the Implementation Plan;
- Meet six times per year;
- Provide written updates to the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee on a quarterly basis; and
- Furnish the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee with an Annual Report on progress.

A set of indicators will be developed to measure progress over time in several key areas.

Cross-Sectoral Working Groups

In the implementation of this Strategy and the actions outlined in the implementation plan, the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee may identify cross cutting areas of work which would benefit from the establishment of specific working groups to deliver key actions. For example, a Learning and Development Working Group will be established to implement a number of the actions falling under the ‘Building Workforce Capability’ Pillar.

These groups, where established, will in turn report to the relevant Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy Implementation Subgroup and should:

- Meet six times per year;
- Provide written updates to the relevant Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy Implementation Subgroup on a quarterly basis; and
- Furnish the relevant Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy Implementation Subgroup with an Annual Report on progress.
Implementation
Subgroups

Criminal Justice Strategic Committee

Implementation Subgroups

Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy & Implementation Plan
What does success look like?

The implementation of this Strategy aims to deliver positive outcomes and benefits for the general public, service users, communities and professionals who work within the criminal justice sector. These include:

- Increased public understanding of how the system works
- Stronger perception of procedural fairness
- System users receiving appropriate supports
- System users feeling supported
- Increased interoperability of IT systems across the sector
- Reduction in perceived delays across the system
- Increased public confidence and trust in the system
- Improved inter-agency understanding
- Increase in collaboration and joined up thinking
- Increase in staff feeling supported and engaged
- Increased feeling of engagement within the community

A formal approach will be developed to evaluate the expected outcomes to include a number of targeted surveys.
Strategic Pillar Summary

1. Strengthening Strategic Collaboration
   We will work together with a common purpose to address specific operational and strategic issues within the system to drive efficiency, innovation and value.

2. Improving User Experience
   We will work together to understand and improve our interactions with people who come into contact with the criminal justice system, including victims, witnesses, accused persons and offenders while protecting human rights and ensuring procedural fairness.

3. Data as a Driver
   We will work together to better use and share data and information across the criminal justice sector. This will facilitate better collaboration, lead to more effective policy making and ultimately improve the experiences of people who interact with the criminal justice system.

4. Building Workforce Capability
   We will work together to deliver strong leadership and significant cultural change in order to embed new ways of working at the organisational level. We will develop and nurture collaborative ways of working across the sector.

5. Increasing Public Understanding
   We will work together to improve communications, to deepen community engagement and increase public understanding and confidence in the system.
Strategic Pillar 1
Strengthening Strategic Collaboration

We will work together collaboratively to address specific strategic and operational issues in a joined-up and coherent way. This will support the alignment of priorities and drive strategic collaboration within the criminal justice sector.

One of the biggest challenges facing the criminal justice sector is delivering justice in a seamless and efficient manner. We want to conduct our business as efficiently and effectively as possible, while minimising delays, reducing duplication of processes where possible, and enhancing public confidence in the criminal justice system.

To do this, we will:

- Work together to address cross-cutting strategic policy issues
- Drive digitisation to deliver more streamlined services
- Develop a strong understanding of the causes of delays in the system and how they can be addressed
- Identify and implement new ways of working to increase operational efficiencies across the system engage with the system

Linkages

Improving the User Experience
- Improving flow of cases through the system
- Reducing delays in the system

Data as a Driver
- Using data to measure system performance
- Building an evidence base to improve business processes

Building Workforce Capability
- Facilitating collaborative working through increased inter-agency understanding
- Utilising networks to address issues as they arise

Increasing Public Understanding
- Enhancing public confidence and trust by reducing delays
- Streamlining the funding of projects
Strategic Pillar 2
Improving the User Experience

We will work together to understand and improve the experience of people who come into contact with the criminal justice system, including victims, witnesses, accused persons and offenders, while protecting human rights and ensuring procedural fairness.

To do this, we will:

- Deliver a fair and more effective criminal justice system for all users by streamlining their journey through the system
- Embed a victim-centred approach across all stages of the criminal justice system
- Ensure all victims, witnesses and accused persons have the support needed to effectively engage with the criminal justice system
- Strengthen and enhance our multi-agency approach to engaging with offenders in order to reduce their reoffending and to improve outcomes

Linkages

1. **Strengthening Strategic Collaboration**
   - Reducing duplications of processes to reduce trauma and harm
   - Aligning resources to develop a common approach to information provision

2. **Data as a Driver**
   - Using data to identify delays in the system
   - Using evidence and data to understand the user experience of the system

3. **Building Workforce Capability**
   - Raising staff awareness of barriers related to diversity and the inclusion of minority groups
   - Training our staff to embed a trauma-informed approach

4. **Increasing Public Understanding**
   - Increasing understanding of the criminal justice system
   - Engaging meaningfully with stakeholders to ensure their needs are met
Strategic Pillar 3
Data as a Driver

We will work together to better use and share information and improve data quality. This will inform decisions and encourage a unified understanding of issues and problems, will facilitate better collaboration, lead to more effective policy making and ultimately improve the experiences of people who interact with the criminal justice system.

For research and analytics, the key mechanism will be the Criminal Justice Operational Hub. This will provide ‘end to end’ data, pulling together data currently held across the criminal justice sector. In doing so, it will support a ‘system wide approach’ of analysis supported by increased data governance and management.

Streamlining our approach to data collection and research will also increase our capacity to think systemically, and to deliver more effective policy solutions.

To do this, we will:

- Support a data culture to ensure an evidence-based approach to policy making
- Use research, analysis and data to identify new and emerging trends
- Ensure better management and use of knowledge, data and research through the ability to link criminal justice data sets

Linkages
We will work together to deliver significant cultural change in order to embed new ways of working at an organisational level. We will develop and nurture collaborative ways of working across the sector and build the capability of our workforce to lead adaptively and think systematically. We will deliver appropriate training to support a trauma-informed, diversity aware, and culturally sensitive workforce.

Our people are key to developing a more joined up criminal justice system. The consistent development of our people is a critical success factor in the implementation of this Strategy.

To do this, we will:

- Support and develop a diverse, empathetic, and trauma-informed workforce
- Increase inter-agency understanding and support our staff to innovate and think beyond organisational boundaries

**Linkages**

**Strengthening Strategic Collaboration**
- Aligning training needs, delivering the right resources in the right place
- Addressing cross-sectoral training needs in a joined up way

**Improving the User Experience**
- Supporting our staff to deliver a standardised and professional service
- Working together to build a trauma-informed, victim-focused workforce

**Data as a Driver**
- Developing the capability of our staff to make evidence-informed decisions
- Supporting the sharing of information and best practice via staff networks and training programmes

**Increasing Public Understanding**
- Supporting collaboration with the wider community
- Working together to create a diverse and inclusive criminal justice system
We will work together to improve communications, to deepen community engagement and increase public confidence in the system. Enhanced engagement with the community will increase understanding of the criminal justice system, which will lead to greater public confidence.

To do this, we will:

- Increase public awareness and understanding of the criminal justice system
- Develop a structured form of engagement with key stakeholders to support the development of services and the formulation of policy
- Develop consistency in our communications with the public