



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Draft Strategic Framework for
Reducing Offending**

12 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

Draft Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Jennifer McCann
Mr Basil McCrea
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Peter Weir
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Ms Sharon Beattie)	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr Paul Doran)	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Mr Brian Grzymek)	Department of Justice
Mr John Todd)	

The Chairperson:

This session will be recorded by Hansard. I welcome Brian Grzymek, who is deputy director of the reducing offending unit; John Todd, who is the head of the reducing offending unit; Sharon Beattie, who is head of custody healthcare; and Paul Doran, who is the deputy director of the

Probation Board. I hand over to the officials to outline their document, after which members will have the opportunity to ask questions.

Mr Brian Grzymek (Department of Justice):

Thank you very much. We have given you quite a big pile of papers, which I am sure you have read with interest. Those papers are made up of the document and the evidence base, which is an important part of what we have given you. Those will give you a good insight into what we are trying to achieve. Over the next five or 10 minutes, we will briefly go over some of the key points.

Reducing offending is one of David Ford's key ministerial priorities for the coming session. That links directly to his vision for a fair, just and safer community, and reducing offending is a critical part of delivering on that. Initially, it was also represented in the Programme for Government.

I stress that this is not just another strategy to add our list of strategies. Our aim is to use this initiative to build an overarching framework within which we locate our different justice priorities and ensure that they are working together to deliver on our vision. Essentially, we are trying to get all our strategies to run with the grain rather than against it. However, if we are going to be successful in reducing offending, we need to do more than just tune and streamline the justice system itself. To be successful, we really need to take forward two strands. We need to support joined-up justice, but, importantly, we need to promote and support joined-up government, as both are critical.

If we get it right, our expectation is that there will be significant benefits for Northern Ireland in reducing offending with real reductions in the financial, social and societal costs of crime. In the Department of Justice, our aim is to streamline and orchestrate activities to ensure that we have a coherent and integrated approach to delivering the right outcomes, and that partnership approach, which is critical to the success of the initiative, is reflected in the composition of our team today. Across government, we aim to set a vision for a better, more co-ordinated approach and, essentially, to stem the flow of new offenders by increasingly tackling the root causes of offending. In essence, we aim to turn off the tap of new recruits to offending by dealing with

some of the issues upstream rather than when offending behaviour occurs. We hope that, taken together, the two strands will reduce the footprint of justice over time in Northern Ireland.

I want to stress that reducing offending is not seen as a soft option, and we are in no doubt that we will need to retain the full range of justice disposals for difficult and dangerous offenders. For such individuals, the full force of the law needs to be available and applied. However, any of us who have gone round prisons or other institutions and talked to staff know that they say that very many people in those institutions should not be there. We know that many vulnerable and, essentially, lost individuals end up offending. Our aim is to improve the interconnectedness of government programmes so that such vulnerable individuals can be redirected, ideally before they start down the journey of offending behaviour. However, to do that, we need vision and a shared understanding of the problems across government. The real challenge is to get government working in a joined-up way.

David Ford and Department officials have been developing important links at ministerial and official level, but one of the reasons why we brought the initiative to the Justice Committee at this relatively early stage, bearing in mind that we are aiming to produce a document and put it out for consultation in March or April, is to give the Committee an opportunity to help us shape the initiative. There is also a significant potential role for the Committee, as advocates of our justice system, to support the initiative and to help smooth the way when we are talking to other Departments and agencies. It is fair to say that, given the current funding situation, Departments are always reluctant to take on new initiatives, and it is important that we make the case to them in a persuasive and effective way.

That is all I want to say by way of introduction. John Todd, my deputy, will give you some more detail on the framework.

Mr John Todd (Department of Justice):

Thanks, Brian. I will talk in some more detail about the strategic framework and its outputs and outcomes. It is clear that reducing offending is a complex and multi-stranded issue, and we have developed the strategic framework on the basis of local and international research and evidence. The framework has benefited from the input of a range of people and organisations within and

beyond the justice system. As you can see, the framework takes a thematic approach and will allow us to bring together the strategies, reforms and plans for action that will reduce offending and to dock them into the framework.

I will now turn briefly to the five themes. The first three themes are essentially about preventing offending, as Brian said. Theme 1, tackling the social determinants of crime, is about structural and societal improvements that will reduce offending, including improving education, increasing employment, reducing poverty and providing appropriate accommodation. Theme 2 is more focused on the individual and deals with early interventions, alcohol and drugs, restorative approaches and mental health issues. Theme 3, reducing opportunities to commit crime, is about the context in which crime is committed, and the aim is to make Northern Ireland a more difficult place in which to commit crime. Themes 4 and 5 are focused more on what happens when somebody does offend and comes into the justice system. Effective delivery of justice addresses important issues such as sentencing, assets recovery, reducing delay and clear-up rates. Finally, theme 5 deals with reducing reoffending through pathways to resettlement and rehabilitation, offender management, supervision in the community and removing barriers to reintegration.

We have identified four high-level outputs that the strategic framework will deliver. Output 1 will be the aforementioned docking of strategies and plans into the framework. That will pave the way for a second output, which is the agreement of prioritised actions across the framework. Thirdly, we will need to agree the delivery of those actions with other Departments and relevant stakeholders. The fourth output will be to achieve joined-up oversight, evaluation and publication of interventions. Taken together, those actions and outputs will deliver a co-ordinated cross-government approach to reducing offending. It will, of course, be essential that those outputs create tangible, real-world outcomes.

Overall, our outcome is to make Northern Ireland safer through a long-term reduction in offending and an associated reduction in levels of crime and criminality. That is broad in scope, so we have developed four more detailed outcomes that will allow us to assess the impact of the framework. They are a reduction in the number of first-time offenders entering the justice system each year; reduced repeat victimisation; a statistically significant reduction in reoffending; and a reduced average age of desistance from crime. There is a diagram, which you might find helpful,

at the end of section 4 that sets out those outputs and outcomes.

Having described the framework and its outcomes, I will now hand over to Paul, who will give an operational view and some practical examples of reducing offending in action.

Mr Paul Doran (Probation Board for Northern Ireland):

Thanks, John. The Probation Board warmly endorses the direction of travel for the strategic framework for reducing offending. At the end of December 2011, the Probation Board was supervising nearly 4,500 offenders on a range of orders. Of those people, 900 are in prison and will be subject to post-custody supervision, but the other 3,500 are currently on community orders. Two out of three of the people on orders are under the age of 35. Ninety one per cent are male, and 2% are aged 17 or under.

We have seen a significant increase in the work undertaken by the Probation Board. During 2010-11, a total of 3,800 orders were made, which was a 16% increase on the previous year. This year, there has already been a 9% increase in our work. In fact, community service orders are up by 15%. A number of members have made visits and have seen community service for themselves. Last year, offenders under community service orders undertook 160,000 hours throughout Northern Ireland.

We are very pleased to note that the most recent statistics provided by the Department show that three out of four offenders who are given community orders do not reoffend within 12 months, which compares favourably with custody. Three out of 10 of the people who get orders have an additional requirement to undertake a range of programmes.

Recently, a number of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) reports have touched on the work of the board and, I believe, are linked clearly to the direction of travel for the strategic framework. For instance, a report in June 2011 highlighted the value of pre-sentence reports, which meant that judges had reliable options for sentence. They were held in high regard by the courts. Equally, there was a very constructive report on victims and witnesses. I know that the Committee is looking at the issue of victims next week. We are already working with the Prison Service and the Department of Justice (DOJ) on amalgamating the victim information

schemes that we run. That is one of the key recommendations of that report. The Committee will be aware that, last week, the first pilot supervised activity order commenced in the Newry area. That provides an alternative to short prison sentences for people who do not pay their fines. We believe that it is a very positive development.

Other multi-agency partnerships that we are involved in are with the police on the public protection arrangements, with social services on the Safeguarding Board, and with Women's Aid and statutory agencies on the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) domestic violence partnerships. My colleague Sharon Beattie from the police will talk to you shortly about the reducing offending partnerships. I want to highlight the fact that everything we do reinforces the key principles of the document. Offenders are citizens first, and, if we work constructively across agencies, we can reduce the number of victims, which is the main driver for the work of the Probation Board.

Ms Sharon Beattie (Police Service of Northern Ireland):

Thanks, Paul. Chair and members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk from a practical perspective about a particular project in which we work in partnership with some of our criminal justice agencies. Reducing offending in partnership, which was previously referred to as integrated offender management, is a strategy to deal with priority offenders who cause the most harm in our community. The strategy deals with offenders who engage in what we refer to as inquisitive crime, which is really volume crime but links in to burglary and theft. It accounts for 33% of the crime that is committed in Northern Ireland.

The reducing offending strategy is contained in the policing plan for 2011-14. It does not focus on sex offenders; they are dealt with through the public protection arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI). The range of criminal justice agencies, including the PSNI, the Probation Board, the Youth Justice Agency, the Prison Service and the DOJ, are developing the concept under the reducing offending strategy. That is about identifying offenders and engaging with them with the right interventions at the right and most appropriate time. There are three strands to that process. The prevent and deter strand is the early intervention stage, which is being taken forward by our colleagues working in health through the children and young people's strategic partnership. The police have the main role in the catch and control strand, which is a proactive

approach by the police to those who are causing the most harm to individuals in the community. The rehabilitation and resettlement strand involves the police signposting offenders who want to turn their life around to the appropriate agencies and third sector, including the Probation Board and the Youth Justice Agency, which will take the lead in that strand.

Throughout Northern Ireland, catch and control teams have been set up in the PSNI. They have been operating in every district in the past three months. Each of them consists of two sergeants and eight officers, and Belfast has come together with the A and B districts having the largest catch and control team. We have not appointed any new officers; this is a restructuring that involves officers who were dealing with volume crime in the past. It is a move away from dealing with the hotspots to a focus on the offenders who are causing the most harm. We do that by “matrixing” the offenders. The top 60 offenders in every district are matrixed by way of a score. That is done in conjunction with our neighbourhood policing teams, with information from the community, and with the Probation Board and Youth Justice Agency, which agree on the matrix and on who we should be targeting.

The process has been running in a pilot format within H district — Ballymena and Coleraine. It has been running in Ballymena within the past year and Coleraine within the past six months. We have had considerable success in reducing crime in those areas. In the Ballymena area, we have reduced overall crime by 12.8%, and, in H district, we have reduced it by 11%. The overall reduction in crime has been 3.8%, so there has been a higher percentage reduction in the areas where our process has been operating. In Ballymena, there has been a 40% reduction in theft and a reduction of over 20% in burglary, since the process has been operating. Those are the 2010-11 figures; obviously, our 2011-12 figures have not been published yet, so I would not want to confirm anything from them.

The next step is to line up our processes with other agencies, particularly those involved in the health and education sectors. Seventy per cent of the offenders that we deal with have mental health or addiction issues, and we need a care pathway for those individuals. Some of them may need or require to be diverted out of the criminal justice system. We also require education programmes and are looking for a way forward in respect of career opportunities. We are also working with our prison colleagues at the pre-release and the committal stages, so that we are

joining up the circle and the information is flowing from the time offenders go into prison to their release.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to brief you. If anyone has questions, I will be happy to answer them.

Mr Grzymek:

I am conscious of time, so that pretty much finishes our presentation. There are a number of important initiatives taking place, but clearly there is more that we can do. There is more that we can do within the justice area, but, importantly, we need to be able to work more effectively across government if we are going to deliver the outcomes that we are seeking to achieve. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson:

Brian, thank you very much for your presentation. I have a couple of questions.

On the issue of buying in support from other Departments for what you are planning, such as the Health Department and the Employment and Learning Department, how are you going to be able to achieve that with their conflicting priorities? How will you make the case that more money should be spent on offenders than on the normal population?

Mr Grzymek:

It is fair to say that we have more levers within the area of justice. Beyond that, it is much more about influence. David Ford and departmental officials have been talking to a number of the other key Departments, and there are some commonalities in interests. For example, the Health Department is investing in health and is looking at what it does now to secure future health. Some of its initiatives align quite well with our requirements. There are areas where we can work better together collaboratively, but it will be a challenging time.

One of the dangers is that some of the gains from reducing offending will take time to deliver. Clearly, if you are dealing with people by way of early intervention, those gains may be some years away. So, in some ways, we need government to act as government and to see this as an

agenda that covers a number of years. However, we have had very positive responses from a number of Departments. It is for us to make the case, and we put that evidence base together to demonstrate that we are not just talking about unproven ideas. We are showing that, if we do the right things at the right time, we will get real and sustained benefits for Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson:

Where does that all sit with the deterrent of tough sentencing and going to prison? You can profile areas and people, and you can target resources to the social issues that motivate people to commit crime — if that is ever an excuse. How do you deal with individuals who will be criminals because they want to be? It does not matter how much education or how many job opportunities you give them, there needs to be some kind of deterrent, above and beyond better housing and so on, to prevent them committing a crime.

Mr Grzymek:

I am not expecting the Department of Justice or the justice agencies to go out of business as a consequence of the initiative. We want to make sure that the people who need to be in prison are in prison and that they get the right support when they are there. If they are very dangerous or are a public menace, they may have to be in prison for a very long time. We are not changing that. We are saying that, at the moment, when you look at it objectively, you see that some people could have been dealt with differently earlier and should never have been there. We want to divert those people. It is not about giving people an easy option. It is about saying that, where vulnerable people end up drifting into offending and, therefore, perhaps costing society a great deal of money over many years, an investment in those people at the right time will allow us to redirect that resource to more socially useful purposes and outcomes.

Mr B McCrea:

I want to pick up on the Chair's point, though maybe on a slightly different tack. There is a perception that all these initiatives are quite good in an individual situation, and evidence shows that they reduce offending. However, you also have a position that the more you do, the more it looks like a holiday camp, and the public do not like it. The public think that people have done wrong and that you are putting them in there and taking them on outward bound courses and doing this, that and the other. How will you explain to the public that the strategies that you have

outlined will reduce offending in the long term?

Mr Grzymek:

I think that I have already explained — I will maybe pass over to one of my colleagues in a second — that our aim is not to do away with prison or other disposals. We are saying that a number of individuals who are presently in the justice system should never have got to us. Often, those people will have been known to other services and, perhaps, have been missed or have fallen between stalls. Many of them could be redirected away from offending in the first place. That is obviously a better outcome for society. I will pass over to my colleague from the Probation Board, Paul, to explain that we are not talking about soft options when we are looking at alternatives to some of the existing services.

Mr Doran:

I recognise that the public have a perception that community sentences are a soft option, and the Probation Board wants to challenge that. We use the phrase “seeing is believing”. If people can see community sentences in action, they will hopefully understand them a bit more. I also want to challenge the idea that money spent on trying to move offenders away from offending should be spent in that area as opposed to on supporting victims. I do not see them as mutually competing. I will use the example of domestic violence. A number of years ago, we started to run programmes challenging perpetrators of domestic violence, and we had some engagement with Women’s Aid and other organisations, which suggested that the focus should not be on the perpetrator but rather on supporting the victim. Now, we work very closely with Women’s Aid, because we recognise that work with both perpetrators and victims should take place. A synergy can be achieved through that. We have been very successful in moving perpetrators of domestic violence away from offending, while, at the same time, providing support to victims.

I recognise, however, that the public need to be convinced. Last year, Make Justice Work published an interesting report, which was sent to Westminster. Its conclusion was that it is clear that community sentences are demanding, with many offenders finding them much tougher than prison. While I would never suggest that we can replicate prison in the community, I certainly believe that it is the job of the Probation Board to give confidence to Members and the public that sentences are being managed appropriately. The work —

Mr B McCrea:

I want to challenge you on that a wee bit, because it is something that I and, I believe, others do not quite understand. We keep hearing stories reported in the press that someone who is out of prison on some form of release or probation then goes and creates mayhem. We ask why such people are let out when we know that they will do no good. I am asking you about the communication exercise that that requires. Many people are totally unfamiliar with the difference between a parole board, the Probation Board, community service, the youth justice system, a youth justice conference — a plethora of things. It is so complicated that the public can be forgiven for not really understanding what is going on. You have to deal with a communication exercise before you start to say what you are going to do about it.

Mr Doran:

Yes; I recognise that, Mr McCrea. Certainly, during the past 12 or 18 months, we have invested in trying to improve our communications. Starting with Assembly Members, we have tried to encourage them to come along and visit projects. I know that you and other Committee members, including the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson, have done so. I think that it is fair to say that you have been reasonably positively impressed. However, you have put the challenge to us that we need to put that across. We have, therefore, tried to engage with local media outlets and newspapers in every town in Northern Ireland, so that people feel that the justice agencies are working on their behalf.

Equally, we believe that the introduction of policing and community safety partnerships from April will be a very positive step forward. As you know, the Probation Board is likely to be a designated body. Again, we believe that that is an important medium by which to try to get the message across that every pound spent in preventative work means that not everybody needs to go to prison, apart from those who are dangerous and pose a risk of harm to others. We fully accept that there has to be a deterrent. However, we believe that more can be done to help to move offenders away from prison and to deal with them in the community.

Mr B McCrea:

I would like to ask another question if I may, Chair. I would like to take it to a slightly different

position. I had an interesting meeting with the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), the Probation Board and the Prison Service. We talked about certain issues. The issue throughout this document and in an awful lot of what you are talking about is that the real roots of crime are somebody else's responsibility and should be dealt with through early intervention, education or whatever. Is there a danger that you are not concentrating specifically on matters that are in your direct control? For example, vis-à-vis training in prison, we are churning out bricklayers by the thousand. When you look at what jobs they can get, you see that there are no jobs for bricklayers out there. The statistics show that someone is more likely to reoffend if they cannot get a job. Therefore, I would like to see you focus on controlling what you can control.

The general point is that many people who are in prison were previously in Hydebank Wood. We know who those people are as they go through the system. Surely, if you talk about early intervention, you should focus specific resources at the earlier stages of the criminal justice system, where you have, quite literally, a captive audience. That is where you can do the work that more properly relates to you, while, of course, supporting colleagues in other areas that are not directly in your remit.

Mr Grzymek:

You raised a couple of points. First, because we have aimed for a strategic framework, what we are trying to do is to ensure that all the things we do actually complement each other and work better. We have a very strong focus on the justice system and making it work properly. So, it is not about us trying to pass the parcel. In fact, we are saying that we deal with people who are already offenders and, as you say, the further into the offending system they get, the harder they are to turn around. That is a truism. So, you are absolutely right: we need to put resources upfront. There is £20 million that goes into the Probation Board, which does an awful lot of the upfront work on supervision and community disposals. The majority of people that the Probation Board deals with in those settings do not go on to reoffend. However, there is no doubt that those who do go on to reoffend become progressively more difficult to turn around. So, we have to have a focus on our responsibilities.

It is not unreasonable to say, however, that no matter how well we do our jobs, when we go

into work the next day a new offender will be coming in. If we are going to reduce offending, we cannot just stop at the boundary of justice and say, “We will do as well as we can and will just keep doing it”. If we are going to make real progress, we also have to ask whether there is anything that can be done before people are sent to us that will put them onto a different track. There is absolutely no doubt that somebody who has been to prison several times is very likely to go back. Somebody who has never been to prison, or who just comes in on a community order, has a low chance of reoffending — Paul can give us the actual figure. If someone who perhaps has got involved in antisocial behaviour and has not really got into the justice system at all receives the right influence or direction, they may never go on to offend.

I am not trying to duck the question. I am saying that we need to do what we can in the justice sector to make our system as robust as possible. However, if we are going to get real progress, we have to work with others to start dealing with the problem upstream as well.

Ms Beattie:

Mr McCrea, I will add to addressing your points about focusing on what is in our control and perceptions that we are going soft on offenders.

The catch and control strand of the reducing offending in partnership strategy is not a soft option. Offenders who do not want to turn their life around will have their activities subject to a proactive approach by the police. One investigating officer will deal with an individual, whether it is about a breach of bail or a serious crime. If that person does not want to engage with the likes of the Probation Board, they will be returned to prison and contact with the police will be maintained.

With regard to early intervention, the police are very much involved in working with social services in the identification of young people who are at risk and have the potential to become our next offenders. They identify individuals who are at risk — they could be family members of offenders or others — and look at bringing in early intervention.

Mr Dickson:

Thank you for your presentations. I want to look at the issue of prisoners who are on remand.

Your paper tells us that some 625 people are on remand, which is over a third of the prison population. I appreciate that people are regarded as innocent in that situation. Nevertheless, there must be opportunities for you to intervene with remand prisoners. I would like to know what specific directions and actions you take with remand prisoners to either prepare them for long sentences or to work with them to ensure that their disposal, if it is going to be a community order or whatever, happens as quickly as possible. As stated in the section on speeding up justice, the longer you are in prison on remand, the more likely it is that you will become conditioned to prison life, which increases the potential that you will reoffend.

Mr Grzymek:

The issue of remand is a cause of concern, as regards both the adult prison population and the juvenile custody end of justice, where about half of young people in custody are on remand. Ultimately, within the access to justice part of the Department, we are working to speed up justice, because delayed justice is an issue. Secondly, we are working with the judiciary and others to see whether there are alternatives to putting people into prison on remand.

Clearly, there are some very dangerous people who are, quite rightly, in prison on remand, but there are many people for whom that is not the case.

The framework is obviously not trying to replicate all the other departmental strategies; it is trying to dock them in to our overall approach. We are looking, as part of the access to justice element of our overall approach, at alternatives to custody for people who do not need to go in to custody. We are also looking to see how we can speed up justice so that fewer people go in on remand unnecessarily. We are also working with the judiciary so that we are very clear that people who need to be remanded in to custody are remanded and those who do not need to be remanded are dealt with in some other way and perhaps stay in their community. Clearly, however, that has to be done working with other justice partners.

Ms Beattie:

As you know, Mr Dickson, offenders who are on remand do not get any offender management. Basically, that is the choice of the offender or because they are there on a short-term basis. That is the same as those who have sentences of less than 12 months. The prison has agreed to work with us and prioritise any of those who have been identified as a priority offender and go in to

prison, whether on remand or on a less than 12-month sentence, and look at developing some type of programme or intervention for those individuals.

Mr Dickson:

Can you point to statistics in relation to, for example, that snapshot in time of 625? What happened to those 625 people? How many of them went to prison? How many of them did not commit any crime or were let off? How many were disposed of in other ways?

Mr Doran:

I do not have the figures for what happened to them, Mr Dickson. The Northern Ireland Prison Service may have those figures. You are right to highlight that it is a very difficult group to work with. Very often, the solicitors of people on remand advise them not to co-operate with the Probation Board because it would be seen as an admission of guilt. If they are encouraging them to go for a trial, they will not get involved in any work. We will offer work to every prisoner; there is a committal interview with every prisoner who comes in.

Mr Dickson:

Surely there has to be a workaround to that. Surely it is not beyond the wit and ability of the Probation Board and solicitors who advise their clients to have a protocol that takes you outside that area that would lightly tag you with some form of admission of guilt. Clearly, solicitors must see whether their clients have mental health issues or potential reoffending issues; we are all human. They should be able to identify it. That should not be a barrier to somebody getting help when they need it. That would be an appalling situation.

Mr Grzymek:

The dilemma is that, if they are on remand, there is no compulsion; you cannot compel them to —

Mr Dickson:

Clearly, I understand that.

Mr Grzymek:

Equally, it is very difficult for us to influence defending solicitors.

Mr Dickson:

Yes, but why do you not sit down and talk to them? I mean the system, not the individual.

Mr Doran:

One of the positive developments in recent years has been the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, which introduced electronic monitoring. It has been very successful for people on bail. If a person can be managed in the community safely under a tag, that is much preferable to putting them into custody, particularly for a young person, where there will be a delay. As you are aware, although crime is going down, the numbers in prisons have gone up, including the numbers on remand. One of the concerns has been that the people who get tags may not have been the people who were going to be remanded in custody anyway. It is something that we need to look at with the judiciary.

Ms Beattie:

The police are undertaking a review of healthcare in custody. Hopefully, that will identify those individuals at a much earlier stage, before they even get to the prison gates. We will look at working with our health colleagues to identify mental health or addiction issues so that the people can be referred or appointments can be made for them at an earlier stage. That is one programme.

We are also looking at the summary case form that goes to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and having the identified mental health or addiction needs on that so that the solicitor and the PPS prosecutors are made aware of that at an earlier stage.

Ms J McCann:

You are very welcome. It has already been said that you are always going to get certain criminal elements who will have to go to prison and be taken off the streets to protect people. Bearing in mind what you are doing, I have some questions about younger offenders who carry out low level types of crime, and may be only starting out. I do not think that you have to sell the idea of early intervention, because the statistics and evidence are there: the earlier you intervene in a person's life, or a child's life, the better chance they have of having a better path through life.

There are four Departments you could look to for preventative-type strategies: Health, Education, Social Development and Justice. Spending on preventative measures is better for the economy and everything in the longer term, because keeping someone out of jail will leave more money to put into other services.

From what I can ascertain, early intervention has to involve the whole family. As you said, 70% of young people in particular who go to prison have mental health issues, addiction issues and all sorts of issues. They are quite young and a lot of them, but not all, come from dysfunctional families. The family is a very important unit that needs to be supported. With some young people in our communities now, you can nearly tell the path that they will take in their lives just from the family background, poverty and everything else that is there. That is why I am strongly in favour of early intervention in a young person's life for the sake of the longer term.

You spoke about a targeted approach for the individual. Do you also see a targeted approach for the family? Those young people will have to go back to those families again, and there is no point in letting them go back into that type of system. For a lot of these families, it is not the fault of the parents. I am not trying to suggest it is a parental issue, but some of those parents will have been quite young when they had the children. Bearing in mind those social and economic problems, I wonder whether that is the way you work with the family unit as opposed to just with the individual.

Mr Grzymek:

I will start on that. The truth is that we know many people who go on to offend come from very disadvantaged situations. Sometimes, they come from families that have themselves had troubles a generation earlier, and sometimes even over a few generations. So, you will find that we get youngsters who may not have good role models, or perhaps their parents have had problems. That makes it more difficult. Having said that, I have visited many of the adolescent units and the Youth Justice Agency and have spoken to quite a few parents, and I have not found any of them who do not want the best for their children. Some of them do not feel adequate, or they feel that they are being overwhelmed —

Ms J McCann:

They just need a bit of support sometimes.

Mr Grzymek:

You find that. Almost universally, it is not as if they do not wish the children to succeed; it is just that they feel sort of caught or entrapped. So, it is important to support families, and that has to happen within communities. Organisations such as the Youth Justice Agency work with families as well. It is not unusual to find a situation where the youngster is reluctant to work with the agency, and they succeed by working with the family to get them to deal with the child in the right way to help them develop and move on properly.

I was here yesterday evening at an event that was held for the Street by Street initiative. It was quite interesting. There are local community volunteers going out in south and east Belfast who were not just talking to youngsters on the street but to families. In some ways, they were linking some of those children and youngsters — who are probably seen by some elderly people as being frightening or alien — back into the community and working with the families as well. A number of good initiatives are dealing with that. I will pass you over to Sharon to say a bit more.

Ms Beattie:

I keep coming back to the practical examples. The reducing offending strategy has an early prevent and deter strategy, which is about engaging those who are on the fringes of crime. As was mentioned at the start, that is very much the role of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, and we are a key partner with it in trying to work with families. We work with the families of priority offenders, and that could be the parents or the younger brothers and sisters. That may involve a family counselling session or mentoring for individual family members. For example, we engaged the mother of one of our young priority offenders in the Ballymena area in a counselling service as part of the rehabilitation of the family as a whole, not just of the particular individual. The Youth Justice Agency is very much involved in early intervention, and the young people are very much part of the identification process as well. So, the answer is yes.

Ms J McCann:

The million dollar question is: do you see a willingness from government to put money into that preventative side of justice? You said that the crime figures have gone down, but the numbers of people in prison have gone up. How much willingness do you sense in the Department to accept this as the way forward?

Mr Todd:

I think that there is a real willingness. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and other Departments are recognising the value of early intervention when it comes to return for money spent. The earlier you spend the money, the better return you will get. For every £1 that you invest at ages 0 to 3, there will be a benefit of up to £7 further down the track. We are working closely with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, which is developing a similar framework for public health and looking at the social determinants of health, which are obviously very similar to the social determinants of crime, and we will make sure that both frameworks line up.

Mr Grzymek:

We did a study a couple of years ago, which I shared with the previous Committee, on the cost of crime. It was a fairly crude exercise, but it showed that Northern Ireland was spending about £2.9 billion a year on dealing with crime. That was about twice the total cost of the justice system. If we can get this right and start to suppress crime levels, thereby reducing the number of offenders, there will be gains in the form of government savings across the board and, downstream, the Department of Justice will not need to be so big if we have fewer offenders. There are benefits in intervening early, and there is also a gain for society in reduced costs. That is an interesting issue at a time when public finance is tight.

Mr McCartney:

Thank you for the presentation. I will make a very broad observation. The first bullet point on the challenges for reform quotes the prison review team, and states that reducing offending needs to be:

“part of each department’s strategy and budgeting, and ... engage[s] voluntary and community organisations in both planning and delivery”.

Is there an assessment of where that is now and where it should be if we are to be successful? I

do not see it in the document. It is a statement that you can make, and it is obviously true and straightforward, but we need an idea of where it is now and where it should be ideally if we are to deliver what we are trying to achieve.

Mr Grzymek:

Are you saying —

Mr McCartney:

It says:

“One of the key recommendations of the Prison Review Team states that reducing offending needs to be ‘part of each department’s strategy and budgeting, and ... engage[s] voluntary and community organisations in both planning and delivery’.”

I read the prison review team’s final report, and it does not think that that is high enough at present.

Mr Grzymek:

We probably do not think that it is high enough either. However, that said, this is journey that we are on. The reducing offending strategy is now linked to the Programme for Government, together with serious offending, and that will give us a lever. Also, as John noted, we are working with and talking to our colleagues in some other Departments, who are developing parallel initiatives that have a fair degree of synergy with what we are trying to do.

Mr McCartney:

How do we pull them together for people to say that, if this does not change to this degree, our chances of success are minimised? The document, on page 24, states:

“Around 341,000 people live in relative income poverty. Over 100,000 of these people are children.”

If, in five years’ time, that statistic remains the same or goes higher, the assumption from reading the document is that the possibility of reducing crime is made more difficult. You are rowing against the tide if there is not a proper strategy in place to change that statistic so that your chances of success get better.

Mr Grzymek:

That is one of the reasons why we are talking to the Committee today. We do not have a

complete answer to that. David Ford is talking bilaterally to other Ministers, and he will bring this document downstream to the Executive. Alongside that, officials have been talking to officials in other Departments. The document was sent to all the permanent secretaries across all the Departments by Nick Perry a couple of weeks ago in advance of this meeting. That flagged up our direction of travel.

Subsequent to this meeting and whatever advice that we get from the Committee, we will develop the document further. We will talk to all the Departments. In an ideal world, I would like them all to hardwire it in to their strategies. At the moment, it is probably not sufficiently well represented. This is part of a process, and we are not yet at the end point. We have put together a firm evidence base. There are parallel developments, such as the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in health, which is focused on early intervention. That is very much a parallel initiative. Some of our community safety work links to the Department for Social Development and others. Again, that will complement what we are trying to do. We are trying to orchestrate some of the different initiatives across Departments and build up a recognition that, if we get all of those things into alignment, we will get a much better outcome than if we do everything in silos. That is a challenge for us. Members of the Committee could bring it to other Committees on which they sit on or the other Departments that they link to. Ultimately, we need to tackle this from both ends and the middle. The Minister is certainly making representations to other Departments, as are officials. We obviously need to make sure that the message gets across.

Mr McCartney:

There is a section in the document entitled "Designing Out Crime". We have seen excellent examples about properly designed housing estates. The emphasis in the document is on better doors and windows, which means that the number of burglaries goes down. We all know about better street lighting, better orientation, no back lanes, etc. I am sure that Dove Gardens in Derry has all those aspects in its design. However, educationalists make the point that even the size and space in which children operate in a house has an impact on their educational attainment. Normal design is that the third bedroom is a wee box room. The children may have to go to the kitchen table if they want to study. If they live in a big family, the kitchen table is not always available and so homework is not the priority. They insisted that the designs of the houses accommodated

study areas in bedrooms. If we are going to change the underlying trend, it should not just be seen as good windows and doors stop burglars. The money that is spent on good doors and locks could also be used to ensure better space in the house so that, in disadvantaged areas, people will have better opportunities in life. That is a general observation.

Mr Lynch:

Thank you for the presentation. Do you see a role for restorative schemes in the process of reducing offending, particularly early intervention?

Mr Grzymek:

Very much so. As I said earlier, I was at that Street by Street presentation yesterday evening. We were talking to Baroness Newlove, who was looking at that as an example of good practice in Northern Ireland. Restorative practice, whether it is in the community or the justice system, is a weapon in our armoury to deal with offending. In fact, we are increasingly seeing restorative practice outside the justice sector in schools and other places, where it is a practical way of dealing with difficult and disruptive children and helps them to recognise the consequences of what they are doing. It is an important part of the process.

Mr Lynch:

Brian, have you visited some of the schemes that are operating?

Mr Grzymek:

I only visited one of the schemes. My division was reconstituted only recently, and I have only taken over responsibility for community restorative justice in Northern Ireland in the past two months. So far, although I met representatives of all the main organisations on more than one occasion — as I said, I was at meetings last night and this morning with Alternatives, looking at, for example, the Street by Street project — I have not got round all of them yet. However, I will be visiting all the major schemes over the next couple of months.

The Chairperson:

Nobody else has indicated that they want to ask a question, so I thank you all very much for coming to the Committee today.

As I said before the evidence session started, a draft consultation document is going to be prepared. On the basis of what you have heard from the officials, are you content for that document to be drawn up? Unless there is any other steer that members want to give to the officials, they will draw the draft paper up and provide it to us in, I think, March. Are members happy to proceed on that basis?

Members indicated assent.