

Briefing note for meeting with Chair of High Level Task Force on Mental Health

09 March 2022 @ 10.00am

Key discussion items

- Update on the Taskforce's progress to date
- Discuss the development of the Taskforce's final recommendations and associated issues
- Discuss implementation of recommendations.

The purpose of the meeting is to provide Ms. Kathleen Lynch, Chair of the High Level Taskforce and the three Taskforce sub-chairs, with an opportunity to update Minister McEntee, Minister Donnelly, Minister of State Mary Butler and Minister of State Frank Feighan on progress to date.

As the Taskforce's work is well advanced with the group hoping to complete its work by a final report expected by end Q1 2022, the meeting will also focus on some of the key recommendations emerging from the work of the sub-groups and what will be required to support them to ensure delivery within expected timeframes. Many of the recommendations relate to improving on, or creating better alignment of, existing services for those with mental health and addiction issues in the criminal justice system. These include improved health supports and will have resource implications for DOH and HSE as well as justice sector actors.

Commented [JXD1]: Elsewhere we have switched to the phrasing complete its work, due to considerations on editing as well as publishing report.

Commented [JXD2]: Should we also acknowledge possibility of resource implications for justice sector?

Implementation of the Taskforce's recommendations and how this might be approached to ensure successful delivery will be discussed. The Taskforce will recommend actions which are for implementation in the short, medium and longer term. Given the cross-Departmental cross-Agency nature of the Taskforce's work, careful consideration of the appropriate monitoring mechanism to underpin the effective implementation of its recommendations will be required.

Background

The Programme for Government commits to the establishment of a Task Force to consider the mental health and addiction issues of persons in prison and primary care support on release. It also acknowledges the recent Mental Health Policy "Sharing the Vision" and commits to establishing the National Implementation and Monitoring Committee to oversee this work.

The High Level Task Force (HLTF) was established in April 2021 by the Minister for Justice in conjunction with the Minister for Health. Officials from the Department of Justice provide the secretariat. However, implementation obligations fall to a range of Departments and bodies.

The HLTF has held ~~eight~~ **nine** meetings to date. ~~(Note: 9th meeting scheduled for 3 March).~~ It established three expert subgroups to enable work to progress on several strands at once including diversion, prison and central mental hospital capacity and community through care. Each of the subgroups is comprised of relevant experts, and chaired by high ranking officials from the criminal justice sector, with the health leads represented and contributing to all. The subgroups have each met on at least nine occasions. The Chair of the Taskforce has also held meetings with subgroup chairs, and officials from both Departments on an *ad hoc* basis.

The three subgroups are:-

SG1: Diversion: Chaired by Chief Supt. Gerry Roche, Limerick Garda Division AGS.

SG2: IPS/CMH Capacity: Chaired by Dr. John Devlin, Clinical Director, Irish Prison Service.

SG3: Community issues and through-care from custody:-Chaired by Mark Wilson, Director, Probation Service.

The Terms of Reference of the HLTF (overleaf) require the group to submit an interim report to the Minister for Justice and Minister of Health. The **interim report**, setting out the work of the HLTF and each of the subgroups, was completed and submitted for the information of both Ministers in November 2021.

The Taskforce has engaged with a large number of relevant bodies and civil society actors including a meeting with the Mental Health Commission on 2 December 2021 and, more recently, the Chairs of Prison Visiting Committees and the Inspector of Prisons on 3 February 2022. The Taskforce has also received presentations from the Irish Penal Reform Trust and Crowe Consulting on the comprehensive Health Needs Assessment embarked on by the Prison Service. The HLTF has also received presentations from stakeholder groups working with prisoners and their families including the Bedford Row Family Project and the Dillon's Cross Project. The HLTF met with Ms. Justice Judge Liseult O'Malley in connection with the work of the Sentencing Guidelines and Information Committee to consider possible synergies between the work of the HLTF and the committee.

A key commitment of the terms of reference of the Taskforce is the delivery of a **high-level implementation plan** for any required actions arising from the groups work. The Taskforce has taken three thematic focuses which it considers capture the entirety of an individual's interactions with the criminal justice system, these are:

1. diversion of individuals with mental health difficulties and addiction/dual diagnosis issues away from the criminal justice system,
2. the capacity of the Irish Prison Service and the National Forensic Mental Health Service, and
3. community issues including through care from custody.

In examining issues and performance across each of these themes, the Taskforce hopes to be able to make positive changes at each point, before formal engagement in the criminal system, supporting rehabilitation of those in custody and ensuring the most successful reintegration into society.

The Taskforce is aiming to provide this high level implementation plan for its recommendations at end Q1 2022.

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference –High Level Taskforce

- (i) To assess how best to take forward the recommendations from the first and second reports of the Inter Departmental Group to examine issues relating to people with mental health issues coming into contact with the criminal justice system
- (ii) To consult with stakeholders and consider relevant reports, proposals, recommendations and strategic actions including, but not limited to, the recommendations of the Council of Europe Commission on the Prevention of Torture reports and the ongoing work of the Steering Group on the Health Needs Assessment under way in the Irish Prison Service, with a view to identifying any additional actions relating to people with mental health challenges or a dual diagnosis of mental health and drug or alcohol addiction challenges who come into contact with the criminal justice system that may be necessary
- (iii) To prepare a High Level Implementation Plan by end of 2021 outlining lead responsibilities and timelines for any actions identified in (i) and (ii) with operational subgroups being set up as necessary.
- (iv) Report on implementation periodically to relevant Ministers and Ministers of State.