Dear Minister McEntee,

I have pleasure in presenting you with the annual report for 2020 of the Interagency Group for a Fairer and Safer Ireland.


This report outlines the work the Interagency Group undertook during 2020.

Progress continued during 2020 to improve access by offenders to the public services they need on release to increase their likelihood of social conformity. The Covid-19 pandemic presented particular challenges for the Irish Prison Service (IPS), both in protecting prisoners from infection and in safely releasing offenders to the community. The success of the IPS in preventing infection within the prison estate is a remarkable achievement and a credit to all concerned. The cooperation between the Prison Service, the Department of Housing and the local authorities in finding accommodation for homeless offenders released from prison during the pandemic was exemplary and provides a model for tackling the problems facing homeless offenders. The cooperation of the IPS and the HSE in protecting the health of offenders before and after release throughout the year was also excellent.

In its report, the Group draws attention to the need to build an evidence base of the social, economic and educational profile of offenders and their outcomes to provide a basis for more effective interagency cooperation to reintegrate offenders and reduce crime. The CSO has published pioneering work in this respect which needs to be built on. There is much we could learn from other countries about how to capture and share information for this purpose. Interagency coordination remains hampered by the absence of a unique identifier of offenders across criminal justice agencies and the absence of data sharing arrangements across all agencies with responsibilities for offenders on release.

As I step down from the Chair of the Interagency Group, I would like to thank the members of the Interagency Group for their commitment to improving cross government cooperation in relation to offenders and penal policy. I would like to thank the officials of the Department of Justice who support the work of the Interagency Group and the secretaries of the Group over the past five years in particular – Keith Lynn, Chrystele Brunet-Lee, Aaron Murphy and Timothy Hurley. May I wish my successor as Chair, John O’Callaghan, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Justice, every success in continuing the work of interagency cooperation to increase social conformity among offenders and to reduce crime.

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Ruth Barrington PhD
Chair
March 2021