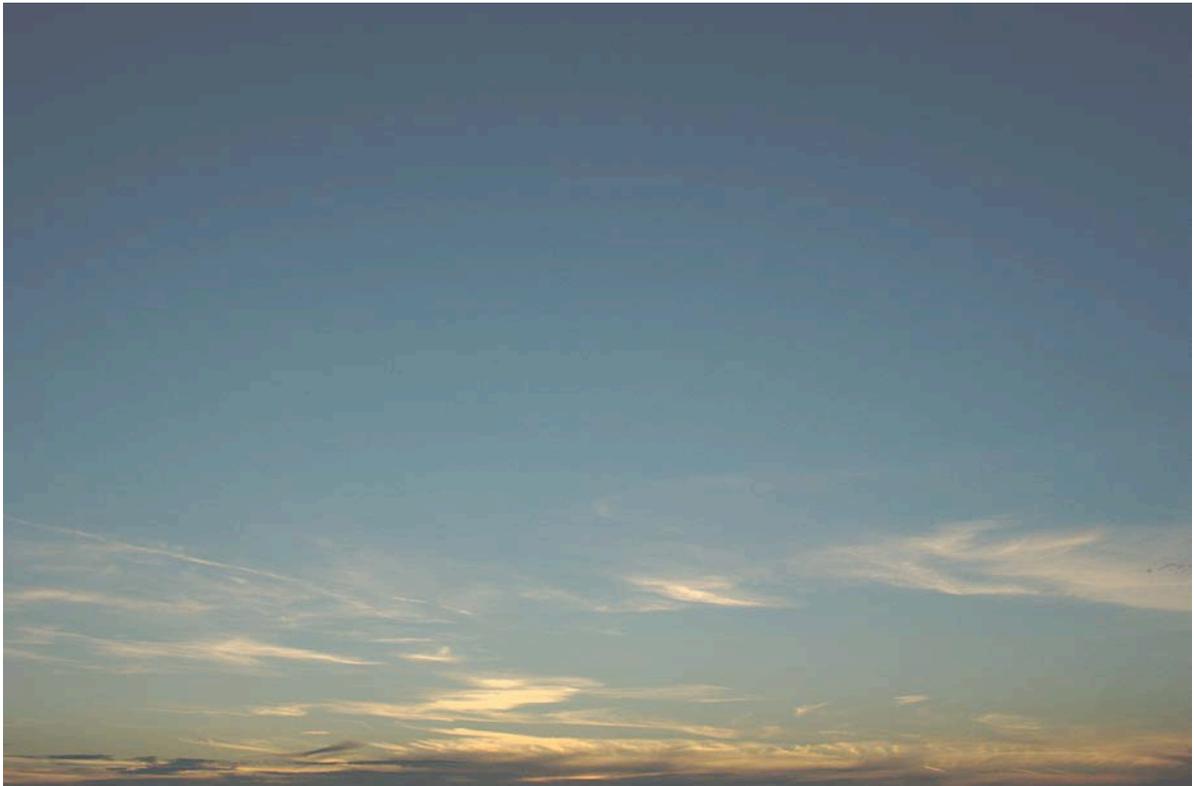




Department of
Justice
www.dojni.gov.uk

Reducing Offending: Towards a Safer Society



Consultation Response Pro Forma
June 2012

CONSULTATION RESPONSE PRO FORMA

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on our proposals on how best to reduce offending. All comments are welcome; however, we would particularly appreciate your views on the following questions:

Core Principles

Do you agree with the core principles? Do you have any further comments about them? (Page 12)

Extern is in general agreement with the core principles. We believe some work could be done to better explain what exactly they mean – the document appears to have been written for those who are already familiar or are working within areas of the Justice system, but we are not sure that some of the terms used would be easily understood by the general public. One of the themes of the strategy is to encourage joined-up thinking and shared responsibility between and across departments. The way in which the Core Principles are presented suggested they are separate and in isolation. We would be of the view that more could be done to demonstrate the relationship between the principles as we believe this might make the document more purposeful. There are clear relationships but they don't appear to have been defined within the document.

In terms of further comments – given the focus on the evidence-based reading material provided as part of the consultation there are three additional principles Extern believe could be considered:

Focus on Early Intervention – As part of this consultation process we facilitated a small group of adult offenders. Four of the five participants identified their offending pathway commenced when they were 12 or 13 years old. Extern currently provides an early intervention programme for children aged 8-13.

Focus on Addressing Deprivation – given that deprivation and social need have been identified as key contributors to offending it is surprising this has not been incorporated.

Focus on Reducing Inequality – it would appear from the material provided that many contributing factors to offending can be linked to inequalities within our society.

The Context

Are there particular aspects of Government's approach to reducing offending that you believe are working well and should be maintained? (Page 15)

Extern believe the devolution of justice can only contribute to a more progressive system and we are pleased to see the changes that have occurred over the last 2½ years.

The change programme will contribute greatly to making the justice system more effective and efficient.

Speeding up justice if achieved will go some way to countering the level of prisoners on remand and should be a priority within the current programme for change.

In Extern's experience we are dealing with increasingly higher levels of offenders who have alcohol and addiction issues and mental ill health. Within our programmes of support we have sought to address directly or signpost service users whose lives are impacted by these issues to enable them access to treatment and support. These areas need to be properly resourced, particularly when people are returning to the community and are at their most vulnerable. Through our own reviews of service user needs we are aware that alcohol and drugs have played a significant role in the life choices made, particularly of those younger adults aged 18-24 who have been through the justice system.

Provision of support to children and families who are affected by a parent being imprisoned is crucial particularly where this may result in social isolation and family breakdown.

In terms of remand and short sentence prisoners, Extern believes more could be done to support individuals whilst in custody and create better links to community based organisations. Alternatives to short periods in custody should be a priority (community sentencing) and the community can play a major role in this.

Are there any other key strategic drivers which you consider need to be included? (Page 20)

The Key Strategic Drivers have been developed within the justice sector and although they are supplemented by other important drivers from across the Executive, Extern believes more can be done to encourage joined-up approaches and joined-up thinking across all government departments and agencies.

How can Government better join up all the strands of activity? (Page 20)

Extern believe a mapping exercise across departments, agencies and provision in the voluntary and community, and private sectors is likely to provide Government with a clear picture of services available linked to reducing offending. Through developing a baseline Government should be able to identify gaps in provision, avoid or reduce duplication and provide clearly defined pathways between departments, agencies and other providers that can enable better delivery of services.

The Strategic Framework

Do you agree with the structure and the content of the Strategic Framework? (Page 29)

Extern believes the Strategic Framework is more effective at outlining the aims of the strategy than the Core Principles have indicated – we suggest clearer alignment between the two. Where the Core Principles don't appear to be joined-up and areas not emphasised (early intervention, addressing the causes of deprivation) the framework appears to be more joined-up and aligned with the Programme for Government

The Minister has set out an ambitious reform agenda that will require significant effort to deliver over the next three years. Are there particular elements of the framework that you believe require urgent attention over the next three years in addition to these priorities? (Page 29)

Extern commends the work done to identify priorities and develop the framework. Ideally we would like to see the speeding up of justice, addressing mental health and addiction issues and management of offenders particularly within the community as urgent priorities but believe it would be difficult to prioritise elements that require urgent attention without first reviewing and agreeing what resources are available from across the Departments to address priorities. In fact this may be the urgent priority to have an agreed strategy with input, involvement and sufficient resource from across the Executive Departments agreed hopefully a lot sooner than within three years.

Which elements of the framework should be considered as priorities for the medium and longer term (i.e. the next four to ten years)? (Page 29)

Extern believes the approach to reducing offending must be long-term and seek to not only address issues prevalent within the current offending population, but also seek to address the issues affecting those on the edge of offending and those with the potential to enter offending due to their life circumstances and life choices. We believe a priority in the longer term has to be a collaborative approach to removing deprivation and poverty, access to housing, vocational training and jobs that can provide alternatives to entering the criminal justice system.

Do you have any comments on how the community can best support people to move away from criminal behaviour? (Page 29)

Education and awareness raising and community-based alternatives to support offenders.

Outputs and Outcomes

What are your views on exploring a Reducing Offending Task Force/Strategic Partnership model? (Page 32)

Given the responses already made within this consultation Extern would be of the view that a Taskforce or Strategic Partnership model is likely to be more effective in developing and implementing the joined-up approaches and developing effective solutions, provided it has clear objectives, outcome measures, time frames and support from across the Executive.

Do you agree with the outputs? (Page 33)

Extern agrees with the outputs described.

Do you agree with the outcomes? (Page 33)

Extern agrees with the outcomes as described although believe the ultimate outcome might incorporate 'a safer, fairer and more equitable NI'

Equality Statement

Do you consider that any of the proposals in this document would have a positive or negative impact on any Section 75 group? If negative, are there any potential means of mitigating such impact? (Page 34)

Extern believes the aim of this strategy and an outcome from it will be to create a safer, fairer and equitable society in Northern Ireland. We believe the strategy is ambitious but only achievable if Departments across the Executive can work together to achieve these aims.

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Date _____ 28th September 2012 _____

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Comments should be returned by **5pm on 30 September 2012.**