

**Address by Brian Lenihan, T.D.,
Minister for Children
at the
announcement of the Youth Justice and Child Protection Package

Government Press Centre
19 April 2007**

Thank you for your attendance here this morning. I am pleased to be joined by Sylva Langford, the Director General of my Office; Michael Donnellan, Director of the Probation Service; and Chief Superintendent Pat Cregg of An Garda Síochána who heads up their Community Relations Office and has responsibility for the Juvenile Liaison Service.

This Government is committed to ensuring that the needs of children are fully met. We have established my Office for Children. We have set up the Irish Youth Justice Service to spearhead the co-ordinated delivery of services to young people. I have brought in the provisions of the Children Act to expand the options a court will have at its disposal when deciding on how it deals with a young offender and ensure that imprisonment will be a last resort.

Today I am announcing:

- a further increase in resources to the Probation Service and the Irish Youth Justice Service with the creation of 75 new posts – the majority of the posts will go to the Probation Service. By any standard this is a significant allocation and demonstrates this Government's commitment to deliver for children.
- I am also pleased to announce that the Government has approved my proposal to increase the number of Judges allocated to the Children Court by three with appropriate support staff also to be appointed.
- The Garda Commissioner has decided to increase the number of Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers working with young people by 28.
- In addition, the Government has asked the Commissioner has been asked to review the Garda resources in place to monitor the activities of paedophiles and sex offenders.

The Government is particularly conscious of the need to give priority to addressing the problem of juvenile crime. Unchecked, juvenile offenders can go on to become serious criminals and wreak havoc on our communities. Even where this doesn't happen, offences committed by juveniles have a disproportionate effect on local communities causing considerable fear and anxiety to a large number of citizens and creating an atmosphere of lawlessness. A response specifically tailored to the needs of young people is required with custodial sentences as a last resort.

We have taken a number of significant measures to date, including the passing and commencement of the Children Act, 2001 and the establishment of the Irish Youth Justice Service. What is now required is a focus on accelerated implementation and in particular the provision of additional targeted resources to tackle the problem. The proper implementation of the Children Act is by its nature, with the necessary emphasis on personal counselling and supervision, human resource intensive. But it

will produce a major dividend in addressing juvenile crime and diverting offenders away from such behaviour in the future.

At the forefront of this implementation are the Irish Youth Justice Service and the Probation Service. The additional resources announced today will allow for the recruitment of key specialist personnel to the Irish Youth Justice Service to address areas such as the development of programmes to reduce offending by young people, attending to the mental health and other social needs of young people in children detention schools and community based projects and implementing local youth justice teams.

The Probation Service will be able to undertake the nationwide implementation of the full range of new community sanctions effective from 1 March 2007. Dedicated Probation Service staff teams will be established for each region in the country.

Resources will also be focussed on key areas such as Southhill and Moyross in Limerick. In short, we will ensure that the Probation Service has the resources to deliver targeted interventions to those most in need.

The number of Gardaí is currently being increased to 15,000, bringing the Force to its highest strength ever and both Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats have pledged, if re-elected, to increase that number further to 16,000. The agreement of the Garda Commissioner to enhance the number of Juvenile Liaison Officers by 28 over the next four years will cater for the increase in the number of Garda Youth Diversion Projects to 100 by the end of 2007. It will also meet the needs of the expanded remit of the Garda Diversion Programme and the introduction of anti-social behaviour measures in the Criminal Justice Act 2006. Juvenile Liaison Officers make a significant contribution to the lives and families of young people in our communities who offend. This is a positive development which, I believe, will show results over time.

The appointment of three additional judges to work exclusively in the Children Court will allow for the putting in place of a dedicated team of judges, with the necessary training, to deal with the diverse and often complex needs of children coming before that Court. This will, in turn, ensure that there is continuity, expertise and experience developed in dealing with the often difficult cases in the Children Court. Decisions taken in that Court determine the future course of many young lives.

Finally, the undertaking by the Garda Commissioner to review the resources currently deployed to monitoring sex offenders and paedophiles will help protect the most vulnerable in our society. Our legislation has been updated and provision made for a sex offenders' register and supervision Orders for certain sex offenders following their release. We must be ever vigilant in ensuring that we know the movements of this dangerous group of offenders. The extra resources for the Probation Service will contribute to this by ensuring post release supervision is robust.

In conclusion, children and young people need and deserve our protection and help to live fulfilling lives. We must continue to provide the appropriate range and level of intervention. Today's package of measures is designed to deliver more for those children.

Thank you.