

**Address by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice,  
Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Michael McDowell, T.D.,  
at the Official Opening of Cork Probation Office and  
the launch of the Probation Service Annual Report for  
2005**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here today to join Michael Donnellan, Director of the Probation Service, Terry Boyle, South West Regional manager, his dedicated staff and other colleagues from the Service to officially open the Cork Probation Office and to launch the Annual Report for the Probation Service for 2005. Today's ceremony marks the conclusion of a successful project that was achieved with the cooperation of many people and agencies including, the Office of Public Works, my own Department and the main contractors. My thanks to one and all for a job well done.

In a few moments you will see for yourselves the fine job that has been completed by the building contractors John F. Supple Ltd. under the watchful eye of the site foreman Mr. Dave Hanlon. I want to say a special word of thanks to the Office of Public Works and particularly to their Project Head, Mr. John McMahan, I would also like to thank Mr. Jack Coughlan, Architect, Mr. Noel Buckley, Quality Surveyor and Kelly Nestor, Structural Engineers for the sensitive way they approached this brief. As you can see they treated the project in a manner sympathetic to the period quality of the structure.

Much of the work of the Probation Service is carried out away from the glare of publicity and for that reason there are times its work may not be fully recognised and appreciated. One might say that the Service is "one of the best kept secrets of the Criminal Justice System". I am therefore delighted to be officially opening this fine facility here in Cork and to give deserved recognition to the work done throughout the country by the staff of the Service.

Looking back over the history of this building I understand that while the present Church of St Nicholas was opened in 1723, there has been a church here on this small hillside, the city's Christian heartland, since the time of St Finbarr. Despite many of the churches in the area having disappeared by the time of the Siege of Cork in 1690, this church was one of only three churches retrieved from the ruins of the siege. St Nicholas' was rebuilt with taxes placed on coal shipped into the port and the name St Nicholas comes from St Nicholas of Myra who was the Patron Saint of children, merchants, sailors and pawnbrokers. This church faithfully

served the congregation and community up to 1995 and I think you will agree that it is fitting that it will continue to fulfil an important community function for many years to come.

So we find ourselves in a building steeped in history. Likewise the Probation Service has a long history here in Cork – going back I am told - to 1972 when the first Probation Officer Mr Dermot O’Connell was assigned to the area. The numbers serving in Cork has increased over the years and there are now 5 Senior Probation Officers, 22 Probation Officers and 6 community service supervisors working out of the Cork office.

It goes without saying that the work of the Service in the community can only succeed with the support of the many voluntary bodies and committed people who work to assist in the reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders. I want to pay a special tribute to the many voluntary groups here in Cork who support the Service in such a vital way. Without their support the Service could not adequately carry out its role and functions. My Department has supported this work over many years. This year funding of over € 1 m has been provided to nine projects working alongside the Probation Service here in Cork to strengthen and support the process of supervision in the community. I am also pleased to say that funding has been sanctioned to develop a Day Centre and to extend the mentoring programme under the Children Act which will operate from in this facility in the very near future.

## **2005 Annual Report**

I am also here today to launch the 2005 Annual Report of the Probation Service. I am struck by the theme of this Report, namely, transformation and change. Indeed, it is true to say that the Probation Service itself is going through a process of change and refocusing that will give it a more strategic direction and allow it to play a very significant part in the criminal justice family. The new Director has been to the forefront in driving this change and bringing a new vision and vibrancy to how the Service does its job. Reflecting for a moment on developments in the last 12 months the Service has:

- Put in place a management structure at Head Office level and a regional structure;
- Changed its name to the Probation Service;
- Developed and published a Strategy Statement for 2006 – 2007;
- Re-designed the website;
- Met the increased demands for assessment and management of offenders;
- Introduced evidence based assessments; and

- Established a dedicated Young Persons Probation Division within the Service to drive out the implementation of the Children Act.

These are very significant achievements and Michael and his team are to be congratulated on this work. I know that there are many other initiatives in the pipeline and I wish you well in the future development of the role of the Service in line with your Strategy Statement.

The Probation Service is an integral part of the criminal justice family and I see it as an important component in the Government's approach to tackling crime in the 21st century. The Probation Service has, for example, developed a particular expertise in assessing the risk posed by offenders; in overseeing non-custodial sanctions; and in promoting measures and programmes that reduce the risk of re-offending. As evidence of this work in 2005 the Service compiled over 8,400 offender assessment reports and managed almost 8,000 offenders in the community.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity to offer my best wishes to all those who will work from this office, especially Terry Boyle and his team. The Service can be assured of the continued support of the Government and my Department as you continue on your voyage of change and re-vitalisation.

Thank you.