

The Probation Service and the Covid 19 Pandemic

As An Taoiseach and the Government have reminded us, the Covid 19 Pandemic is a global emergency the likes of which few, if any, of us has experienced or seen before. It has affected every country and community and has obliged us to change how we live and work. For the Probation Service it is no different.

People have been asked to reduce social interactions as much as possible especially close human contact. That is how the virus is spread.

Outlined here are key actions implemented by the Probation Service in response to the COVID 19 Pandemic for the management of community sanctions. It is an evolving and dynamic time, so as the situation changes, Service practice and responses may change accordingly. As an agency of the Department of Justice and Equality, the Probation Service is guided by their direction on a daily basis.

- In the measures announced by the Government on 12th March 2020, the Government advised that where possible people work remotely, avoid interface meetings and maintain implement health safety practices. Following that advice, the Probation Service is working remotely, where possible, with most offices closed for public business.
- Probation Service management, including financial and operational governance, is being maintained through remote working arrangements. All Probation Service personnel are available and working remotely unless restricted through medical or other reasons.
- The Probation Service is maintaining contact and engagement with staff through their line managers as well as through direct communications. The Probation Service website news and social media are being maintained and updated.
- Interface meetings with persons supervised by the Service and others are suspended for the duration of the COVID 19 Pandemic. Adaptions in practice have been made in order to implement staff and client safety and comply with public health precautionary measures.
- The use of conference calls and video links are promoted for meetings and interactions, where available. In most cases, contact with persons on supervision is being maintained by telephone. Home visits are not being made.
- All Community Service worksites have been closed until further notice due to the public health guidance and to facilitate adherence to social distancing measures. Contact is being maintained by Probation Service staff where needed.
- Most Probation Service supported community based organisations including training, mentoring and other supported services and centres have scaled back or closed operations in accordance with Government guidance. The Probation Service is dealing each on a case by case basis, to make the necessary adjustments they need to do at this time.

- Working in partnership with the Irish Prison Service, children detention centres and the Courts Service, the Probation Service is prioritising the preparation of remand-in-custody reports for the Courts in cases that are ongoing. Video link interviews from designated Probation Service Offices are being facilitated in each prison. In some prisons screened visits are facilitated.
- Regarding supervision of community sanction cases, higher risk persons, clients who may pose the highest level of risk to the public, subject to supervision have been identified and prioritised by each Probation Service team nationwide.
- Practice guidelines have been issued to staff regarding interaction with clients by telephone, while addressing service user risks and needs.
- Prison work by Probation Service teams based in prisons is continuing. Probation Service staff are supporting the Irish Prison Service at this particularly challenging time by primarily providing welfare advice and contact for prisoners.
- Ongoing liaison and contact is maintained with other criminal justice agencies including An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service and the Irish Prison Service as well as available support services in the community and voluntary sector.

As the Covid 19 pandemic crisis continues to evolve with developing responses as the situation changes, Probation Service practice and actions may change accordingly. There will be regular updates through internal communications with all Probation Service personnel and for persons subject to supervision, as necessary, and well as updates on the Probation Service website www.probation.ie and Twitter @probation_irl

If you require further clarification or information please contact the local Senior Probation Officer or Regional Manager or, for external enquiries, send an e mail to info@probation.ie