

Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on Thursday 8th November 2017**Opening Statement by Mr. Pat Bergin, Director Oberstown Children Detention Campus.****Introduction**

Good morning.

Oberstown Children Detention Campus is the national detention facility for the care of young people referred to us by the courts on remand or detention orders. We provide a safe and secure environment for young people, help them address offending behaviour and prepare for a positive return to their families and communities. The Campus is a modern facility, with new buildings and services and our programmes are based on best practice in the care of young people who offend.

Young People who come to Oberstown have generally experienced significant adversity and disadvantage across their lives. They are usually between 15 and 17 years of age, male and have had significant association with the care system. They have struggled with poor experiences in education, many suffer from mental health problems and addiction and have often experienced trauma or loss. Our young people have been through many of the state services and supports, often unsuccessfully, and present with challenging behaviour and complex unmet needs. Our job in providing them with care, education and protection is challenged by these factors, but at Oberstown it is our mission to ensure that 'young people detained in Oberstown Children Detention Campus are supported to move away from offending behaviour to make a more positive contribution to society.' We do this having regard to our values of Respect; Learning and reflection; Working Together; Honesty and Integrity and Commitment to quality care and support.

I am pleased to be here today to report to you on progress at the Oberstown Campus since my last appearance at the Committee in October 2016. My role as Director is to manage Oberstown Children Detention Campus to ensure we provide the highest standards of care for young people in a safe environment for staff, fulfilling the requirements of the Children Act 2001. I work under the guidance of a Board of Management (the Chairperson, Professor Ursula Kilkelly is also in attendance today) and the Irish Youth Justice Service in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Although licensed to accommodate 54 young people, Oberstown currently has a daily population of approximately 40 young people, with a third of these young people on remand orders. We now accommodate young people on detention orders separately from those on remand, which has proven to be a very positive development in providing a safe environment for staff and young people. Those young people who serve longer sentences also enjoy a care regime that is in line with their needs and circumstances.

In March 2017, Ireland reached a milestone in ending the placement of young people in adult prison when the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone, TD, and the Minister for Justice and Equality commenced the relevant legislation. Oberstown played a role in achieving this objective by creating the conditions to enable the Campus to take these additional, older young people and we are pleased to have made our contribution to this historic development.

There have been many other positive developments on the Campus in the last year, which have been important steps in achieving the Oberstown vision and mission. These improvements have helped to consolidate the operation of Oberstown as a safe and secure Campus for the detention of young

people, operating to best practice. Notwithstanding the progress, challenges remain and will to an extent always be part of a facility that is charged with detaining young people with a history of difficult behaviour.

HIQA

Oberstown is inspected by the Health and Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) on an annual basis and in March 2017, HIQA completed an announced inspection of Oberstown over a four-day period with up to five inspectors involved in various aspects of the inspection during that time.

As part of the inspection, inspectors met with children, staff, and professionals from other agencies. Inspectors observed practices and reviewed documentation such as children's placement plans, policies and procedures, minutes of staff meetings, management meetings and board meetings, children's files and staff files.

During this inspection, HIQA found that of the 10 standards assessed, there was compliance with two standards, moderate non-compliance with six standards and major non-compliance with two standards. Immediate action plans were issued in relation to two issues: safeguarding a child in relation to the safe administration of a prescribed medicine; and ensuring that measures were in place to store medicines securely. I provided a written assurance, which appropriately addressed the inspectors' concerns.

Inspectors found that the context in which Oberstown operated continued to be one of major change. They found that many new structures had been put in place since the last inspection. These included new governance arrangements, the recruitment of new senior managers and the development of a human resources section.

Inspectors reported that there was a positive atmosphere in the residential units and inspectors observed warm interaction between children and staff. Children received adequate emotional and psychological care. They also noted that the approach to the management of behaviour was subject to review at the time of inspection; that risk was well managed; policies and procedures were in the process of being reviewed, and the cohort of residential staff had been increased and were adequate.

A comprehensive Action Plan addressing the compliance issues noted by HIQA was developed by Oberstown following the inspection and is currently being implemented by the Oberstown Campus.

All of the issues highlighted by inspectors were already being addressed as part of ongoing work to improve and develop the campus.

One of the areas of concern that the report raised, and that has been a matter of particular attention and scrutiny, is the use of single separation. At Oberstown we continue to improve our record keeping, our monitoring and, most importantly, our use of single separation in line with national and Oberstown policy.

It is important to note that single separation is used upon admission, for behavioural concerns, contraband and individual programmes. When used for behavioural concerns, there is a very clear policy framework in place that staff and the organisation must follow. Oberstown is currently closely tracking monitoring and evaluating the use of single separation, and in October 2017, the Board adopted a statement on Restrictive Practices, to underscore the importance of using single separation, and other restrictive practices, as a measure of last resort.

The Restrictive Practices statement acknowledges that from time to time, young people may display challenging behaviour that poses a risk to themselves, other young people, staff or the security of the Campus. In such exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to use restrictive practices to protect a young person (or persons) from harm, to prevent injury to staff, to prevent damage to property and to protect Oberstown security.

Importantly, the Board's statement makes clear that it considers it is essential to minimise the use of all restrictive practices, to ensure that they are used only in line with policy and procedure and that they are closely monitored and reviewed.

Progress

Looking to other areas of progress, on a strategic level, I have been working with the Board of Management in the development of a three-year strategic plan for the campus. This was approved by the Board of Management in September 2017 and will be launched next month.

The plan has five key strategic goals: Care for young people; Skilled and supported workforce; High standards & continuous improvement; Communications; Systems and accountability. Each goal has a plan and progress is being made to implement a number of objectives under each goal.

In terms of ensuring a safe work environment for staff, the campus has a senior management team, which focus on positive care and security, management of risks and enhanced safety while leading the campus into new period of development. A new Deputy Director with responsibility for Risk and Safety has been appointed and the operations of the central hub have been reviewed, with particular focus across the campus on health and safety. Dedicated staff on Campus are now tasked with developing an awareness of risk assessments, investigations and the individual's responsibility to keep everyone safe.

There have been steps taken to improve both physical and dynamic security with the adoption of a Health and Safety roadmap and a facilities management company has been appointed to provide external support in this area, with the effect of enhancing response times and completing timely and effective remedial building works.

Furthermore, looking to staff's well-being, a peer support initiative - Critical Incident Management Systems (CISM) - is currently being implemented across the campus.

CISM is an onsite service, providing support to staff involved in a workplace critical incident. A team of trained peer supporters provide a confidential, easily accessible and highly responsive 'psychological first aid' service for fellow staff who are experiencing emotional distress arising from a difficult event at work. A Critical Incident Stress Management Policy and a mental health & well-being guide have also been developed.

The Board of Management has also approved a Communication and Engagement plan, which aims to improve our internal and external communications, with staff, young people and their families and other external stakeholders. You may also be aware that we are now publishing research and other data. From April this year, we have been publishing monthly campus statistics regarding occupancy, providing an age breakdown. In recent weeks, we published a more in-depth report on the characteristics of young people placed on the campus for the first three months of 2017. As well as offering insights into offending and sentencing, the data collated from this Q1 Snapshot study highlights the level of adversity and trauma young people in detention have experienced, including the loss of parents, neglect and abuse, and multiple care placements. The data also demonstrates the

multiple overlapping risks and needs young people in detention have, and the many professionals and services they have been involved with. By gathering this data, we hope to inform our services and ensure there is an understanding by all stakeholders and the public of the service we are attempting to provide and the young people we care for in Oberstown.

A number of other initiatives I would like to reference include the introduction of a programme to embed restorative practices into the culture of the campus. The aim of restorative practice is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by building relationships and repairing harm. The programme of training is being delivered by the Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative. A feature of the programme is that training is provided to young people equipping them with strategies for dealing with conflict and violence.

We have also a joint initiative with le Cheile who are providing mentoring for families of young people on the campus in preparation for their release. This unique and innovative programme allows parents and young people who are involved with Oberstown the opportunity to avail of mentoring and family support services in the community. A part-time worker is based on campus to support the project and this service will be in operation for two years.

YAP continues to engage directly with young people on campus in preparation for them leaving the campus also.

The national reconfiguration of the Tusla ACTS service on campus is a positive opportunity to develop further the interagency approach incorporating the HSE mental health services and the campus. We plan to have a more integrated approach to the clinical services available to young people in place in early 2018. This opportunity is a development welcomed by all agencies working at the campus.

We are also committed to ensuring that the views of young people are heard and taken into account in matters that affect them, both individually and as a group. The Board of Management recently signed off on an Oberstown strategy for participation with young people.

In this regard, consultation with young people is ongoing with regular meetings of a Campus Council made up of young people. The Campus Council provides a safe space where young people can actively express their views on issues that affect them. Young people have the chance to influence and hear back from key decision-makers in areas of importance, chosen by them.

All of these achievements are building blocks to ensure that in time, Oberstown becomes an international centre of excellence from both a youth justice and a children's rights perspective.

Review Implementation Group

Finally, you will be aware that in late 2016 and early 2017, a number of reviews of Oberstown were undertaken. In light of the volume and complexity of recommendations emanating from these reviews, in March 2017, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs established a Review Implementation Group chaired by Professor Ursula Kilkelly, Chair of the Board of Management at Oberstown, with representation from Oberstown management, staff, trade union, the Irish Youth Justice Service and an external expert in child development.

Since its establishment, the Review Implementation Group has considered the 120 discrete recommendations emerging from all of the reviews, classifying them according to priority, required resource and owner. Following a period of intense scrutiny and review, work in Oberstown is now

focusing on the implementation of the recommendations of all of these reviews. Designed to enhance the level of care provided to young people and to ensure that Oberstown is a safe place to work, the implementation process is complex, costly and resource-intensive. Aided by the work of the Review Implementation Group and supported by the strategic planning process, it is important this work is co-ordinated and systematic and brings to a close the expert input of all reviewers in order to ensure that the young people in Oberstown have the best possible care and education, as part of their experience of the wider youth justice system.

I wish to thank the Committee for the opportunity to update them on progress and developments at Oberstown, and I wish to extend an invitation to the Committee members to visit the campus at any time to see the facility in operation.

Thank you.