



**Opening Statement by Mr Brian Purcell, Secretary General
to the Committee of Public Accounts**

I am accompanied by my colleagues Mr. Michael Donnellan, Director General, Irish Prison Service, Mr. Eric Brady, Mr. David Hardiman, IPS, Mr. Michael Walsh, Principal Officer and Ms. Teresa Doolan, Assistant Principal, Department of Justice & Equality.

I thank the Committee for this opportunity to explore the payment of allowances to staff of the Department and of the Prisons Service. Those staff, who are in receipt of allowances, are in the main, in the front-line of the fight against crime, be that in the context of operating and managing our prisons and places of detention, or in support services such as providing an expert forensic science service to the Gardaí, or a pathology service.

Members will be aware that expenditure on two separate Votes being discussed here today: Vote 24 Office of the Minister and Vote 21, the Prisons Vote

The fight against crime is a 24 hours, seven days a week resource-intensive effort. Any analysis of the expenditure in the Department's and Prisons Votes bears this out. The requirement for staff to be in attendance on duty at all times is reflected both in the levels of pay specific to attendance on weekends, public holidays and at night, and in the staffing levels required to give constant round the clock cover. On the Prisons side, for example, the overall staffing stands at 3,429 personnel, which includes those deployed across the 14 places of detention, staff in ancillary services, and also central administration staff located at the Prison Service headquarters in Longford.

The Committee will have heard from previous evidence that the use of the term "allowance" covers a multitude of different types of payments. This is certainly the case in the Prison Service where all payments outside of the basic payscale, whether for undertaking certain additional work or duties, working extra hours, or in recompense for expenses incurred, all come under the general heading of allowances. Also in the Prison Service, the requirement of the pay system for a separate allowance name for each variation in payment has created a large number of differently named allowances, most of which actually form part of the core pay for the majority of prison staff. Gross expenditure in the Prisons Vote in 2011 was some €348 million. Payroll costs came to approximately €243 million, and of this amount, over €85 million was spent on allowances, i.e. about 35% of the overall pay expenditure.

I would like to sketch briefly the range of payments that arise by way of allowance in the Prison Service. As set out above, the overall expenditure on allowances comes to over €85 million. Of this amount, approximately €57.5 million is in respect of extra attendance and attendance for unsocial hours outside of normal work patterns. It is

worth mentioning at this point that the Prison Service operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and that there is no time when staff are not required to attend for duty. In addition to this amount paid in respect of extra attendance, some €10.5 million is paid in respect of an agreement, reached after arbitration in 2005, which made fundamental changes to the Prison Service attendance patterns, and resulted in ongoing savings of approximately €30 million annually in overtime payments.

Under the Public Service/Croke Park Agreement an intensive transformation and reform programme is being undertaken in the Prison Service. This programme, which is being undertaken in conjunction with the staff representatives, comprises a complete review of all tasks being carried out by staff in the Prison Service with a view to driving efficiencies and meeting all the targets set out in the Agreement. In addition to cost savings, the programme of reform will deliver improved services both to prisoners and the community, in line with an ambitious 3-year strategic plan.

A significant aspect of the Croke Park Agreement for the Prison Service is a review of allowances in order to align these to the core duties of the service and to direct interaction with prisoners. This review is ongoing in the context of the prison task reviews, and at the Prisons Sectoral Group under the Implementation Body for Croke Park. In addition, following the publication by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform of the results of the review of allowances across the Public Sector, preliminary negotiations have taken place with the staff associations, both on the allowances proposed to be restricted for new beneficiaries, and on those contained in the priority list circulated by that Department. These negotiations will also take place within the scope of the Croke Park Agreement.

I wish now to turn, to Vote 24, Office of the Minister. In general the position in relation to the Department staff is that allowances are split between allowances payable to staff employed by the Department but deployed to front-line posts, for example the staff of the Forensic Science Laboratory, or the State Pathologist's Office, and allowances in payment to staff in the Department itself such as those payable to Service Officers. The pay and conditions of such staff are dealt with at a central level, and as such come within the ambit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform who have responsibility for Civil Service wide allowances.

In brief however, the Committee might wish to recall that the 2011 pay element of Vote 24 was some €147.4 million, of which some €5.8 million was payable by way of allowances in 2011. This represented 3.9% of the pay allocation. The pay allocation in respect of the Justice vote is allocated across approximately 30 different subheads representing a broad range of offices and agencies attached to the Department. These range from the administrative areas of the Department, to the Legal Aid Board, Probation Service, Criminal Assets Bureau, Forensic Science and State Pathology Laboratories to organisations in the Equality and Disability areas such as the Equality Authority and the National Disability Authority.

As has been outlined in recent correspondence to the Committee, while the amount outlined in the Appropriation Account for 2011 included some €2.3 million in allowances to the Children Detention Schools, responsibility in relation to this function has now moved to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and consequently do not feature in the business case made by the Department. If the Children Detention Schools are removed the proportion of allowances as a percentage of pay reduces from 3.9% to 2.4%. In addition the €5.8m Justice allowances figure includes payments to other Votes for the reimbursement of allowance costs for staff assigned to crime prevention and detection work delivered from the Justice Department (e.g. the cost of Gardaí attached to the Criminal Assets Bureau).

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Committee that ongoing reform is a day to day reality for this Department and its agencies. We have been delivering in full measure in relation to the commitments given under the Croke Park Agreement and this will continue.

ENDS