

**2011 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General**

**Appearance of Secretary General,  
Department of Justice and Equality  
before the Committee of Public Accounts, 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2013**

**Opening Statement****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Mr. Chairman,

I propose keeping my opening remarks brief, in the interests of making the best use of the Members time.

Suffice to say that my remit as Accounting Officer is very broad. There are in the region of sixty subheads in the Justice Vote covering a range of offices and agencies across the Criminal Justice Sector, Immigration, Commissions, Equality and Disability areas. I am also the Accounting officer for the Prisons Vote.

In my role as accounting officer, I acknowledge the contribution of the Departments Audit Committee in ensuring that there is a strong system of internal controls in place. The Committee is comprised of four external members and one Departmental representative. The chairperson is external and independent of the Department. The committee is supported by an Internal Audit Unit. The Internal Audit function through its audit work programme provides assurance that there are effective financial and other controls in place. In 2011 there were 24 audit reports completed and the corresponding figure in 2012 was 26. In a Department with as wide a remit as Justice, which comprises over 60 individual subheads and a large number of offices and agencies, such audit assurance is crucially important to me in my role as Accounting Officer.

Also, given the range and breadth of offices and agencies under the Justice Vote it is very important to have a strong governance structure in place. This is not say that we want to stifle or restrict in any way the functions of any of the offices and agencies a number of which are established on a statutory basis. However, I firmly believe that strong oversight is important to ensure the highest standards of financial control and that value for money is obtained from the expenditure in the Justice and Equality Vote. This is something I have continued to build on since my appointment as Secretary General in August 2011.

A key feature of the governance structure within the Department is that each office and agency attached to the Justice and Equality vote while operating according to its legislative status and its own business plan and objectives is accountable to the central Department in terms of budgets and expenditure.

In short, with just a couple of exceptions, all the expenditure in the Justice and Equality Vote is managed through a central accounting system in the Departments Financial Shared Services Centre in Killarney. In turn, the same rules and regulations apply to procurement and expenditure across the Department irrespective of the office or agency involved.

Turning specifically to the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to the lease of accommodation for a Probation Service Project in Wolfe Tone Street, in Dublin I must say that I find it very frustrating that a building which has been acquired under a 25 year lease and fitted out to the standard required for use by the Probation Service cannot now be used for the purpose intended.

However, I have been advised by the Attorney General's Office that this matter remains live, and in dispute and that, in fact, proceedings have now issued in this case, and that notwithstanding the publication of Chapter 15 of the C&AG 2011 Annual Report it is entirely foreseeable that any further discussion of, or comment on, the facts of this matter as set out in Chapter 15

could in effect reveal our hand to the other parties in the proceedings thereby prejudicing the prospect of the State successfully recovering all the damages we are seeking. I confirm that I am of course very happy to discuss this issue more fully at a future date when this case has been concluded.