



## KEY FACTS

# VICTIMS AND WITNESSES: THE CARE AND TREATMENT OF VICTIMS AND WITNESSES BY THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A Follow-Up Review of Recommendation Implementation

OCTOBER 2023



## WHAT IS A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW AND WHY DO CJI DO THEM?

- Follow-Up Reviews are carried out by Inspectors to assess if and how accepted inspection recommendations have been implemented by organisations. They are usually carried out two to three years after an inspection report has been published.
- It allows organisations to demonstrate the improvements they have made.
- It fulfils CJI's commitment to return to assess progress in implementing agreed recommendations and provides a published independent assessment of the progress that has been made.



## WHAT WAS THIS FOLLOW-UP REVIEW ABOUT?

- In 2020, CJI published its third full inspection looking at the treatment and provision of care provided for victims of and witnesses to crime by the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. Previous reports were published in 2005 and 2011 with two Follow-Up Reviews to the earlier reports published in 2008 and 2015.
- In spring 2023 we began work on a Follow-Up Review looking at the progress made by the criminal justice system to implement the four strategic and 12 operational recommendations for improvement we made in 2020.
- During the Follow-Up Review we spoke to staff at the Victim and Witness Care Unit, as well as Police Officers and representatives from Courts, probation, prisons, and the Youth Justice Agency. We also spoke to officials in the Department of Justice about what they were doing to ensure Victim Charter and Witness Charter (the Charters) minimum standards were met and improve the care provided to victims and witnesses.
- Victim Support Northern Ireland, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime also told us what they thought about the implementation of recommendations.



## WHAT WERE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2020 VICTIMS AND WITNESSES' INSPECTION?

### Our previous inspection found:

- more needed to be done to raise awareness of the Charters that set out the rights (entitlements) that victims and witnesses have to appropriate information and protections to take part in criminal justice proceedings;
- senior leaders in the criminal justice system needed to be Victim Champions for their organisations;
- the Victim and Witness Care Unit needed role specific training for their staff and a greater focus on supporting victims and witnesses with what they needed, when they needed it;
- a need for better training for Police Service of Northern Ireland (Police Service) Officers;
- better partnerships were required between the criminal justice system and Victim Support Northern Ireland including how police first responders provide victims with information and a review of the victim needs assessment process; and
- examples of good practice but Police Officers and staff were frustrated by a focus on compliance with process and meeting targets instead of meaningful engagement with victims and witnesses.





## WHAT DID YOU FIND DURING THE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW?

- Inspectors found many dedicated and committed individuals working to improve the experience and care provided to victims and witnesses engaging with the criminal justice system.
- Victim Champions were now in place and had an important role to play in embedding progress and continuous improvement in their organisations.
- There was a mismatch between how well organisations believed they had implemented the inspection recommendations and what evidence and assessment by CJI Inspectors found.
- Despite efforts to broaden knowledge of the Charters, more work was needed to understand how this had improved awareness of and support for the rights of victims and witnesses contained in the Charters.
- Many victims and witnesses continued to experience a fragmented approach to their criminal justice journey.
- Despite a lot of work being completed to design and agree a new operating model and better services provided in the Victim and Witness Care Unit, a lack of funding meant it could not be progressed.
- Positive initiatives for specific groups of victims and witnesses, (like domestic and sexual abuse) were not always joined up with the criminal justice system.

## PROGRESS AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS

**4 STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND  
12 OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**



**Achieved**

**3 recommendations**



**Partially achieved**

**10 recommendations**



**Not achieved**

**3 recommendations**

**None of the four strategic recommendations had been fully achieved**



## WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

- We welcome the steps taken to implement recommendations but there is much more to be done to meet Charter minimum standards, deliver better services and secure better outcomes for victims and witnesses.
- Influence and leverage across the criminal justice system is needed to drive improvement and ensure organisations work better together.
- Plans need to be developed to keep pushing for the full implementation of outstanding recommendations even where budgets are not currently available and we don't have a Minister of Justice to decide to prioritise them.
- Organisations need to demonstrate how they are using their resources to improve outcomes for victims and witnesses and provide care that protects them from re-victimisation.
- CJI Inspectors will return to carry out a further Follow-Up Review to review progress and assess evidence of impact on the experience of victims and witnesses.



If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

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