

PROBATION PRACTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

AN INSPECTION OF THE PROBATION
BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
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DECEMBER 2020

WHAT DOES THE PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (PBNI) DO?

- ▶ The PBNI provides a range of services for men and women subject to a Licence or Probation Order (called service users) to make sure people comply with the terms of their Licence or Order. They also prepare reports for the courts, work with prisoners, provide behavioural change programmes, deliver a Victim Information Scheme and work with partner organisations to reduce re-offending and make Northern Ireland a safer place.

WHAT IS PROBATION?

- ▶ Probation is serving a court sentence while living in the community. People can be released from prison under a Licence or sentenced to complete a Probation Order that have conditions like doing unpaid work, to live in a certain place or not to drink alcohol or take drugs. Probation Officers work with people under supervision to help them to reduce the risk of re-offending and help ensure the safety of people in the community.

WHAT WAS THIS INSPECTION ABOUT?

- ▶ This inspection focussed on PBNI strategy and governance, service delivery and outcomes with a particular focus on case supervision.
- ▶ Case supervision is carried out by Probation Officers who work with service users to assess risks and needs, plan, deliver and implement and review how the conditions of the Licence or Probation Order conditions have been complied with.

HOW DID YOU CONDUCT THIS INSPECTION?

- ▶ CJI partnered with Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Probation who inspect probation services in England and Wales. A methodology was developed with the PBNI that aligned PBNI's practice standards and HMI Probation quality standards before the case file reviews were completed by the Inspection Team.
- ▶ A total of 84 case file reviews were completed by examining service user files and interviewing Supervising Probation Officers. Inspectors also spoke to service users, PBNI senior leaders, managers and staff, representatives of stakeholder and partner organisations and conducted a survey of people registered with the Victim Information Scheme.

WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- ▶ The PBNI needed to improve how its staff assess and manage the risk of harm to others, and focus more on the quality of work undertaken with service users.
- ▶ The PBNI had been through a period of significant organisational change and budget pressures but had embraced and successfully delivered some innovative projects and service developments.
- ▶ PBNI staff were committed to supporting service users to address their offending and change their lives, but many raised concerns about feeling valued, trusted and supported and that the delivery of new initiatives should not compromise the quality of core services.
- ▶ Those consulted during the fieldwork were generally positive about the PBNI and their work with Probation Officers.

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WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors have made **11** recommendations for improvement including:

At a leadership level (strategic level):

- ✔ The PBNI should:
 - ▶ improve how the risk of harm to others is assessed and managed and ensure that management oversight includes focussing on the quality of work completed with service users; and
 - ▶ develop an action plan to address culture and trust issues found to exist during the inspection.
- ✔ The Department of Justice should review the founding legislation of the PBNI and consult on proposals for changes to its status and governance arrangements and, if needed, progress legislative changes for the next Northern Ireland Assembly mandate.

On the ground (operational level):

- ✔ The PBNI should:
 - ▶ review how well information is shared with partner organisations who provide services at hostels where those under probation supervision may live (approved premises); and
 - ▶ engage with partners from the health and social care sector to improve information sharing about service users attendance at mental health and substance misuse services.

WHAT NEXT?

- ▶ The PBNI have completed an action plan which sets out how they intend to implement the agreed recommendations.
- ▶ CJI will undertake a follow-up review to assess progress in two-three years.

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Block 1, Knockview Buildings
Belfast BT4 3SJ
www.cjini.org