

COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IRELAND

A pre-accreditation inspection of North Belfast and South & East
Belfast Community Restorative Justice Ireland schemes

May 2014

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all





Community Restorative Justice Ireland

**A pre-accreditation inspection of North Belfast
and South & East Belfast Community Restorative
Justice Ireland schemes**

Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under Section 49(2) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (as amended by paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 13 to The Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010) by the Department of Justice.

May 2014





Contents

List of abbreviations	2
Chief Inspector's Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Areas for Improvement	6

Inspection Report

Chapter 1 Background	8
Chapter 2 Delivery and outcomes	13
Chapter 3 Operational relationships	17



List of abbreviations

AP	Atlantic Philanthropies
BCC	Belfast City Council
BHSC	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
CFNI	Community Foundation Northern Ireland
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
CRJI	Community Restorative Justice Ireland
DoJ	Department of Justice
DSD	Department for Social Development
NIA	Northern Ireland Alternatives
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIPS	Northern Ireland Prison Service
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
YJA	Youth Justice Agency



Chief Inspector's Foreword

This report assesses the suitability for accreditation of a further two Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) schemes. The schemes operate in North Belfast and South & East Belfast with significant support from the CRJI central office.

The scheme in North Belfast is operating effectively with the police and other statutory providers in a very challenging environment. The positive contributions made by a small and dedicated staff group is acknowledged in the report as indeed is the beneficial impact that they are having in fostering better relationships between the community and the police.

The South & East Belfast scheme is at an earlier stage of its development and does not yet have full-time staffing. However the approach and credibility of the practitioners has already been acknowledged by statutory providers and there are no concerns about the overall direction of travel.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) has identified two areas for improvement which would improve CRJI's overall operational delivery and I am

confident that if addressed, these changes/developments will lead to greater consistency of practice.

I commend the work of these two schemes and recommend that their staff are now considered by the accreditation panel.

Brendan McGuigan
Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

May 2014



Executive Summary

Inspectors found that the North Belfast and South & East Belfast CRJI schemes were providing a valuable and distinctive community work function that was identical to, and on a par with the other CRJI schemes. While paramilitary structures were gone, policing was not yet fully integrated in these areas, and CRJI formed an important bridge between the community and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). This was sometimes at significant reputational and personal risk, yet it came at a relatively low financial cost.

The CRJI relationship with the PSNI was at an appropriate level in both the areas which seek to apply for accreditation. According to CRJI statistics, the PSNI was directly involved in some 50% of cases in North Belfast in 2013, though only in five percent of South Belfast cases. The difference was suggested as reflecting lower levels of anti-social behaviour and crime in Short Strand than Ardoyne, plus the fact that the South & East Belfast scheme had only become properly established in January 2013, and did not have full-time staffing.

The North Belfast scheme operated in a difficult political environment, but had active support from CRJI senior managers. All of the CRJI senior managers, local staff and voluntary practitioners

whom we met clearly considered themselves as much more than 'employees', and they made themselves available at all hours, throughout the year.

The schemes dealt with significant numbers - around 300 cases/1,500 people in total each year - in respect of matters such as family feuds, illegal alcohol sales, drugs party houses, sectarian interfaces, unwanted bonfires, and mediating between locals and ethnic minorities.

In both schemes the 'restorative justice' title belied the fact that they were very seldom involved in direct mediation between conflicting parties - only around five percent of their cases involved agreeing and implementing restorative plans.



As neither scheme was accredited, they were not eligible to deal with Protocol cases, and each file we reviewed was below the threshold of reportable crime. We therefore did not see sufficient evidence to form a firm opinion about North Belfast or South & East Belfast CRJI's ability to undertake direct mediation in relation to criminal matters, which in turn raises an important question about clarifying their medium to long term strategic direction.

Nonetheless, all the CRJI personnel whom we met were very aware of restorative principles. While Inspectors heard a few anecdotal concerns about people who were reluctant to engage with CRJI schemes, absolutely no individual or agency who had actually engaged with them expressed any concern whatsoever, indicating this was a problem of perception rather than reality.

There was no financial practice to consider as neither North Belfast and South & East Belfast CRJI schemes managed funds directly. All monies were channelled through CRJI's Central Office, which had already been proven capable of meeting the standards set by both governmental and charitable funders, and were subject to a range of annual audits by funding bodies.

We identified minor areas for improving case management and administration processes. However Inspectors' expectations in this respect are proportionate: in one instance the Coordinator had no administrative support; and some of the recording was better than we have seen in larger, more sophisticated organisations.

Almost everyone we interviewed was positive about both of these CRJI schemes, and it was clear to Inspectors that they enjoyed the trust and confidence of statutory providers. The criminal justice system and local people benefited from the range of support services on offer, and there was a good sense of community acceptance, built around the work of respected volunteers. We conclude that the practice of the North Belfast and South & East Belfast CRJI schemes is of a sufficient standard for them to progress to the next stage of being considered by the Accreditation Panel.



Areas for Improvement

1

CRJI and its statutory partners should consider and address their data protection obligations to ensure conformity with relevant legislation (paragraph 2.6).

2

CRJI should consider the purposes of its file management and recording processes, and design a system that is consistently applied across all their schemes that meets their own needs and the needs of funders (paragraph 2.10).



Inspection Report



Background

Context

- 1.1 Community-based restorative justice schemes were originally funded to reduce the incidence of punishment beatings by mediating between offenders and local communities. The funding for this work came from non-statutory sources, and the schemes were part of a wider vision of handling disputes within the community without recourse to the law.
- 1.2 CRJI is a collective of community-based restorative justice schemes operating in nationalist and republican areas of Northern Ireland since 1998. CJI originally inspected CRJI in 2007 and 2008. Nine schemes were accredited under the Governments Protocol for Community-based Restorative Justice Schemes in July 2008 (the Protocol)¹, and a further two schemes were accredited in 2011.
- 1.3 They used restorative conferences and other mediation techniques to resolve a wide range of issues including neighbour disputes, complaints about noise and nuisance, parking spaces, landlord and tenant disputes. Previous inspections found the CRJI schemes were valued in their communities. They were operating lawfully and non-coercively, respecting human rights and beginning to develop a constructive relationship with the PSNI.
- 1.4 In recent years the CRJI schemes had evolved considerably, moving away from direct mediation towards a distinctive community work ethos. The uniqueness of this ethos lay in its close links with the criminal justice system. The organisation had taken on board feedback provided by funders, Inspectors and others, and its 2012 Annual Report reflected considerable activity and increasing professionalism. The report contained a specific chapter on the developing relationship with the PSNI, and amongst the achievements noted were:
 - the Investors in People award was achieved - in recognition of the emphasis that CRJI placed on training;
 - partnership with Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA) (CRJI's equivalent in the unionist/loyalist community) had developed;
 - the independent complaints mechanism had been strengthened;
 - accreditation of staff was ongoing;

¹ The Protocol was introduced in 2007. It applied to all cases where schemes dealt with criminal offences. These cases had to be passed via the police to the Public Prosecution Service, who could refer suitable low level offences back to schemes to be dealt with in accordance with the Protocol.

- CRJI was delivering a considerable amount of training to statutory and voluntary organisations, including the PSNI;
- it was participating actively in cross-border and international events;
- CRJI was represented on various sub-groups of the Northern Ireland Policing Board;
- recent developments included a project with members of the Travelling Community in Belfast; and a pilot referral scheme with the PSNI to divert young offenders from the criminal justice system in order to test and review operation of the Protocol; and
- a website had been developed and CRJI was actively engaging with social media to promulgate CRJI messages.

Current Position

- 1.5 At the time of this inspection CRJI was undertaking other new initiatives. One of these involved a secondee from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), and was due to be piloted in several areas including South and East Belfast.
- 1.6 CRJI and its constituent schemes, including North Belfast and South & East Belfast, operated to a Corporate Plan for 2010-13; and an Operational Plan for 2013-14 which contained strategies in relation to education, research, PSNI engagement, housing, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), Communities Actively Restoring Empowerment (CARE), corporate, youthwork and communications. There was also an outline of Corporate Plan themes for 2014-17. The main organisational thrust identified four corporate objectives to:
1. resolve the disputes in which clients are involved in a way that leaves them happy with the restorative justice processes and outcomes;
 2. ensure that the processes, (Protocol and non-Protocol), are efficient and effective in supporting the delivery of restorative justice work and the development of new CRJI focused work;
 3. ensure that staff and volunteers are trained and qualified to an acceptable standard and to acquire consistent levels of competence for the purposes of the service delivery of the CRJI product; and
 4. secure mainstream and steadily consistent levels of funding which will utilise the 'community pound' to best effect allowing CRJI to work efficiently as both a stand alone body and as a partnership body.

The objectives were accompanied by measures, targets, key actions and responsibility for delivery. These seemed appropriate and sufficiently challenging objectives for CRJI at its current stage of development.

- 1.7 CRJI had taken steps since the last inspection to strengthen its governance arrangements. The Board of Directors had widened its membership to include a retired PSNI Assistant Chief Constable, a representative from a residents association in a loyalist/unionist area and a retired Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) manager. A new Independent Complaints Handler was appointed in late 2013, though neither North Belfast nor South & East Belfast had received any complaints during the past year.
- 1.8 CRJI had centralised its formerly autonomous projects in 2011 in order to encourage efficiency and standardise practice. It has also developed a more business-like approach, with management reports furnished in advance to the Board of Management. The Board concentrated on strategic issues, though senior staff remained intimately involved in operational issues, especially where things were challenging.

1.9 CRJI clearly had an eye to the future. Inspectors saw:

- a December 2011 Stakeholder Evaluation Audit which made 11 recommendations for development. These included a robust exit strategy, quantifiable outputs, increased collaboration especially with Northern Ireland Alternatives, more efficient deployment of administrative/management costs, and avoidance of duplication;
- a Structure and Standardisation proposal, dated May 2013 which indicated ambitious plans for development of CRJI, including the appointment of an accountant and a programme manager, updating job descriptions, as well as plans to develop staff roles and working hours; and
- a Social Return on Investment report.

Funding

1.10 After several years of financial uncertainty, CRJI had become more financially secure since achieving accreditation. The total 2011-12 income was £463,000, which represented a reduction of £116,000 from the previous year. Expenditure was £480,000, a reduction of £20,000 from previous year.

1.11 These monies came from a range of funders that included:

- the Department for Social Development (DSD);
- the NIHE;
- Atlantic Philanthropies (AP);
- the PSNI;
- the Department of Justice (DoJ);
- the PBNI;
- the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT);
- the Youth Justice Agency (YJA); and
- Community Foundation Northern Ireland (CFNI).

The fact that most of these were recurring, statutory funders was an indication that CRJI could continue to satisfy high standards of financial probity.

1.12 While the South & East Belfast scheme was funded by monies raised by CRJI Central, the DSD provided all of the funding that underpinned the North Belfast scheme. These funds were disbursed via local Belfast Regeneration Offices, and were all channelled via CRJI Central Office, so there were no financial transactions at local level, apart from petty cash. The amounts involved were in the order of £54,000 for North Belfast and £27,000 for South & East Belfast. Both were cheaper than the average annual cost of running an office which was calculated by CRJI as £65,000 in 2011. The average cost per case was estimated to be £301.

The Schemes

1.13 The North Belfast and South & East Belfast CRJI schemes were established in November 2009 and January 2013 respectively. They were members of the wider CRJI network which had evolved significantly over the past 10 years, and they fitted comfortably within CRJI's community development ethos. A key

element of this ethos was helping to facilitate access to all justice services for everyone in the Ardoyne and Short Strand districts. These communities were emerging from decades of intense conflict, and CRJI was central to ensuring citizens could benefit from the services of the police when they needed them. Both schemes were located in the heart of their local communities, where they had highly accessible premises and staff.

- 1.14 Since receiving accreditation the other nine CRJI schemes had successfully bid for new funding, and had broadened their programme base accordingly. In January 2014 the North Belfast scheme had funding for a Coordinator and a part-time Administrator, premises rental and associated running costs. The South & East Belfast scheme had funding for premises and running costs. The total cost of both schemes was in the order of £71,000 per annum.
- 1.15 Governance was exercised through a line management structure, supplemented by regular team meetings. Inspectors saw minutes of internal meetings in which North Belfast and South & East Belfast Coordinators and Administrators participated. Although outcomes and decisions were not always clear, relevant issues were dealt with, and the minutes demonstrated the local schemes were both supported and held accountable by managers. Inspectors saw minutes of Board, senior management and staff meetings, a case management database that had been introduced in 2011, and a staff vetting database for the North Belfast and South & East schemes.
- 1.16 The North Belfast and South & East Belfast Coordinators were in regular contact with their line manager, who was CRJI's Deputy Director. North Belfast in particular required Central Office support due to pickets and attacks on its premises, and concern for staff wellbeing. The Coordinators reported that the Director and Deputy Director provided excellent support: they were well acquainted with their critics in North Belfast, and were quite prepared to engage in debate with them, publicly or privately, to articulate the CRJI philosophy as well as to protect their staff. In the case of North Belfast, a senior manager lived locally and regularly attended the premises.
- 1.17 All of the CRJI senior managers, local staff and voluntary practitioners whom we met clearly considered themselves as much more than 'employees'. A senior manager was always on call and they made themselves available at all hours, throughout the year.
- 1.18 By early 2014 CRJI practitioners were fully integrated within the management and operations of local community safety structures. While the South & East Belfast scheme had only been effectively operational for a year, the Coordinator was an established community worker who came from the Short Strand, where he was respected for his commitment. As the profile of their main figures continued to increase, this brought the Coordinators into greater contact with statutory agencies.

North Belfast

- 1.19 The North Belfast scheme was established in November 2009. It was based in Ardoyne, though also covered a wider area of North Belfast if requests from elsewhere were received. The premises were leased from a local Community Trust. They were located just off a main thoroughfare and were austere as they had no natural light. Security was tight, with an alarmed steel door, buzzer/intercom and four CCTV cameras. Files and a removable hard disk drive which contained all clients' personal data were held in a secure fireproof cabinet.

- 1.20 The Ardoyne CRJI premises had been repeatedly picketed and attacked since late 2011 because of CRJI's support for policing. Attempts had been made to burn the building, graffiti was daubed on the external walls, the Coordinator had been verbally abused and pickets paraded outside the office with offensive placards. These difficulties generated considerable local media interest, and were stressful for the staff.
- 1.21 Despite the challenges, the North Belfast CRJI scheme was intent on maintaining a local presence. It was significant that local people continued to use the CRJI scheme, even when the office was being attacked. One contributor to this inspection suggested the attacks on North Belfast CRJI actually validated their work, since it demonstrated a desire for normal policing in an area that had been bereft of policing for decades.
- 1.22 North Belfast staffing comprised a full-time Coordinator, a part-time Administrator and three active voluntary practitioners. The Administrator was trained in restorative methods and also undertook casework.

South & East Belfast

- 1.23 This scheme was established in January 2013. It was based in the Short Strand, and also accepted referrals from the Markets and Lower Ormeau areas. Unlike North Belfast there were no real difficulties with community hostility due to CRJI's engagement with the PSNI. The Short Strand premises comprised a rented upstairs office which was shared with a drug awareness group. It had a secure filing cabinet, and the building was alarmed.
- 1.24 The Coordinator worked on a voluntary basis, but received 'fees'. A former Youth Diversion Project worker from Central Office also attended voluntarily for around two days per week to provide administrative support. Five voluntary practitioners had been trained, but most were in paid employment and therefore unable to assist.
- 1.25 Inspectors saw the training certificates of staff and voluntary practitioners in North Belfast and South & East Belfast. These were mainly Diplomas in Restorative Practices that were accredited by the University of Ulster. In addition staff in both offices were undergoing a Level 4 City and Guilds course in Restorative Practice which the DoJ had accepted as meeting their criterion in training for accreditation. CRJI's central database showed there was extensive, wider training for staff and voluntary practitioners.
- 1.26 Inspectors visited the Ardoyne and the Short Strand offices which are seeking accreditation, as well as CRJI's Central Office. The work undertaken by these CRJI schemes cuts across a range of partner agencies and funding organisations, so we spoke to statutory and voluntary organisations, local politicians and community leaders to determine how they complied with funders' and partners' requirements. We also met with CRJI staff and voluntary practitioners, and service users.
- 1.27 In addition to onsite interviews, Inspectors examined case files, minutes of management and operational meetings, internal and external reports, personnel and training records. We considered the schemes adherence to criteria derived from relevant sections of the United Nations '*Basic Principles on the use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters.*'



Delivery and outcomes

North Belfast

Caseload

- 2.1 The North Belfast scheme had a statistical database which illustrated types of referral, outcomes, referral sources, and onwards referral destinations. This was useful data for management purposes, though it was difficult to understand some of the category definitions, or whether there were overlaps in any of the data.
- 2.2 The database indicated that:
 - during January - December 2012 North Belfast CRJI received 229 referrals, representing some 1,300 people; and
 - during January - December 2013 there were 224 referrals.
- 2.3 Other significant headlines from the North Belfast statistical data were:
 - only 10 cases in 2012, and four in 2013, involved direct mediation;
 - there were high levels of involvement with the PSNI - 128 cases in 2012, and 99 cases in 2013; and
 - outcomes for the vast majority of referrals (86% in 2012 and 68% in 2013) were determined as 'Resolved'. This compared with a 'Resolved' average of 73% for all CRJI cases in 2011.

Case Files

- 2.4 North Belfast case files were indexed alphabetically and numerically. Inspectors examined 38 current and closed cases. These included issues such as allegations of adult men harbouring young girls; identification of houses where drugs were being sold; a mural causing dampness on the gable wall of a house; children annoying elderly neighbours; and support for people who alleged they had been sexually abused. The majority of people involved were reluctant to engage in direct mediation because they viewed CRJI as providing an informal opportunity to sort things out, and they preferred to avoid formal intervention.

- 2.5 Communication and information-sharing were core features of CRJI's role in most of these cases. The process was not always straightforward: statutory bodies felt they had to be careful about the information they could share with voluntary groups such as CRJI; and CRJI reported difficulties in information sharing with statutory agencies. The 2011-12 Annual Report said *"...more needs to be done in relation to information sharing across our statutory partners and genuine participation in case conferences."*
- 2.6 Yet Inspectors saw a case where data protection could have been compromised. It involved statutory agencies seeking and relaying hearsay evidence about an individual via CRJI. While the case may be atypical, the issue is very important and ***we recommend CRJI and its statutory partners should consider and address their data protection obligations to ensure conformity with relevant legislation.***
- 2.7 All of the North Belfast cases were contained in polypockets, and apart from printed copies of e-mails, consisted mainly of loose leaf, handwritten pages. This made it difficult to follow the story and ascertain outcomes. However the Coordinator was familiar with the details, and could verbally elaborate about action taken by CRJI in each instance.
- 2.8 While the files lacked sophistication, they were better than some others which Inspectors have seen. They demonstrated that CRJI was providing a valuable support service for both local residents and statutory agencies, especially the PSNI; and it was apparent that some vulnerable people used the office for social and mental health support.

South Belfast

Caseload

- 2.9 Unlike North Belfast, the South & East Belfast scheme did not retain a local statistical database. However figures were returned to Central Office on a monthly basis, which Inspectors were able to analyse in conjunction with a case index and information from the Coordinator. These showed that:
- during January - November 2013 South & East Belfast CRJI received 72 new referrals;
 - the vast majority involved indirect mediation;
 - only seven cases involved the PSNI; and
 - the majority were classified as 'Resolved'.

The very low numbers that involved direct mediation in both North Belfast and South & East Belfast raise a fundamental question about the future strategic direction of CRJI. It would be useful for CRJI to determine how much emphasis it wants to place upon community work, and how much upon restorative justice as part of its medium - long term strategy.

Case Files

- 2.10 The South & East Belfast filing system was different from the system in North Belfast. It comprised two box files – 'Case Report Forms' (which identified themes) and 'Case Notes' (which set out the details). The reason for the distinction was unclear, and it was of little apparent value. All file notes were held in loose leaf format in polypockets, and although handwritten, they were very detailed and legible. A significant amount of work was clearly invested in preparing and maintaining these files. ***We***

recommend CRJI should consider the purposes of its file management and recording processes, and design a system that is consistently applied across all their schemes that meets their own needs and the needs of funders.

- 2.11 Inspectors examined 36 ongoing and closed cases. Outcomes were not always apparent, and the term 'Case Closed' seemed to be used in the absence of an explicit outcome or tangible conclusion. However it is in the nature of community work that 'cases' do not always conclude tidily in a way that will facilitate bureaucratic measurement. It was more important that the Coordinator was able to explain progress verbally, and in detail.
- 2.12 The presenting problems were mainly lower level than North Belfast, and this was suggested as the main reason for lower rates of PSNI involvement. They involved matters such as housing, benefits and insurance queries, noisy parties and family fallouts. There were numerous requests for clarification of paramilitary threats, though it was impossible for CRJI to obtain or provide definitive answers in these matters.
- 2.13 Despite most cases being low level, the significance of CRJI's interventions should not be underestimated. In March 2013, a 250-strong crowd convened at a flat in the Short Strand where drug users were in hiding, after annoying children in the local playground. CRJI were called and arrived at the scene before the PSNI. A serious riot was brewing, but the Coordinator and police worked well together to defuse a highly volatile situation, and safely extricate the alleged perpetrators.
- 2.14 Much of the work did not involve direct engagement with victims or perpetrators of crime. For example North Belfast CRJI supported the father of a girl who had been sexually assaulted by a local man. The father was vulnerable and fearful of the perpetrator in his own right, but was unwilling to engage with criminal justice agencies.
- 2.15 Apart from individual casework, CRJI was actively engaged in wider community development. For example South & East Belfast CRJI hosted a meeting about local Roma people in order to address community misunderstandings and associated tensions. The North Belfast Coordinator was deputy chair of a multi-agency forum which provided a fortnightly opportunity for voluntary and community sector groups to hold statutory bodies to account and vice versa. CRJI also administered this forum. The forum was a practical way of sharing information and making things happen, such as getting bonfires moved, mediating with problem families, conveying legal highs to the PSNI, and securing hazardous derelict houses.
- 2.16 Given their locations, a particularly important role for both schemes was to contribute to the formal tension monitoring processes that were in place at local sectarian interfaces. These arrangements were managed by Belfast City Council, and they relied heavily upon people such as the CRJI Coordinators whose credibility allowed them to maintain active communication with their counterparts in loyalist areas.

Protocol cases

- 2.17 Because they were not accredited, neither North Belfast nor South & East Belfast CRJI schemes had undertaken Protocol cases. North Belfast had offered to work on a Protocol case in 2011 when police requested their assistance: it was a domestic violence matter between a mother and daughter where the injured party was not prepared to give evidence to support a prosecution in court. While North Belfast CRJI indicated a willingness to do so, they never heard any more about the matter.
- 2.18 In any files that Inspectors examined where criminal offences were alleged, the schemes recorded how victims had been referred to the PSNI. In these instances the main CRJI role was to support injured parties in liaising with the police.
- 2.19 Where the case was of a non-criminal nature, there was a clear record of how it was dealt with and the other individuals and organisations involved. The small number of cases where direct mediation was employed all fell below the threshold of criminal behaviour, and were more about anti-social behaviour or neighbour disputes. So while they were geared up for direct mediation, most of the CRJI contribution was really specialist community work.
- 2.20 Nonetheless in the small number (five percent) of their cases that were classified as 'Direct Mediation', which was where protections might be required, Inspectors found that CRJI personnel in North and South & East Belfast understood the *UN Principles on the use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters*. They were ensuring voluntary participation, providing clear information; seeking informed consent, including parental consent if children were involved; and providing access to legal advice and a complaints mechanism.

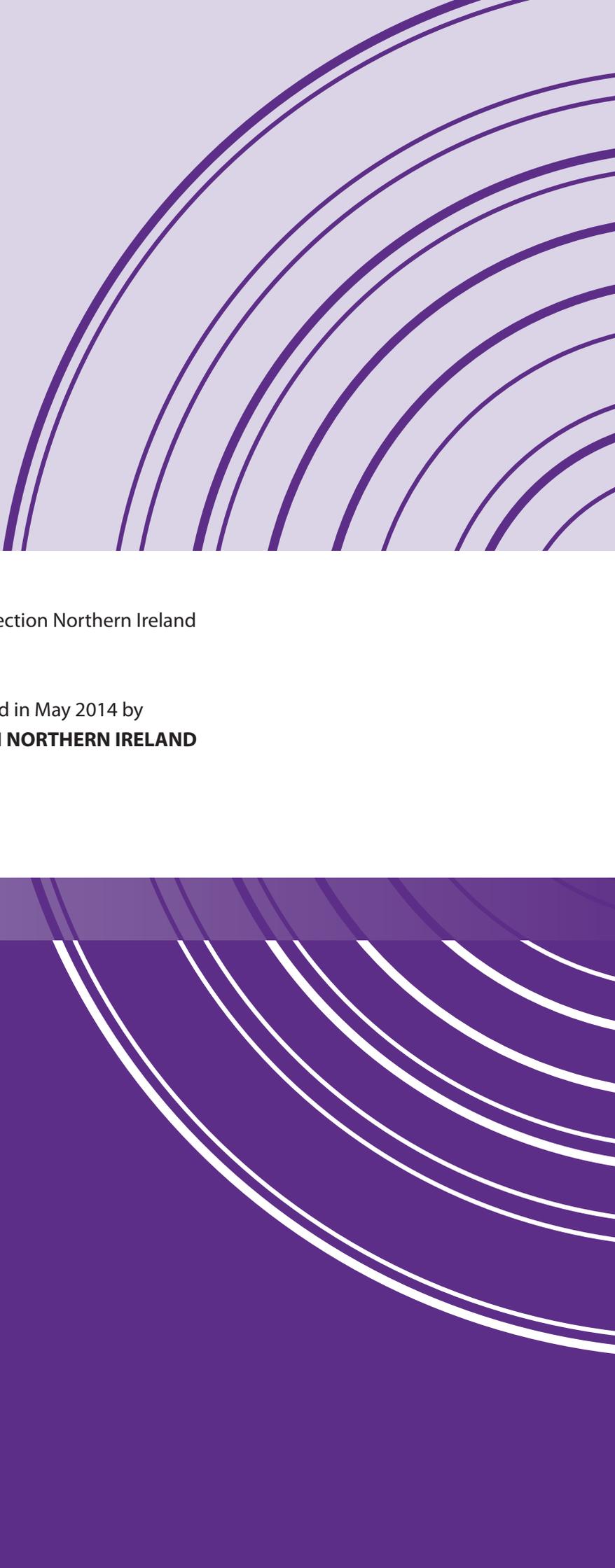


Operational relationships

- 3.1 The North Belfast and South & East Belfast CRJI schemes had effective working relationships with criminal justice agencies, as well as other statutory bodies, such as Belfast City Council (BCC) and the NIHE. Undoubtedly the most significant development in terms of distance travelled, and direct benefit to communities, had been in their relationship with the PSNI.
- 3.2 Inspectors were told by senior police officers that they regarded CRJI as their single most important relationship in the previously estranged communities of Ardoyne and the Short Strand. By January 2014 there was regular joint consultation and training between CRJI and the PSNI at senior level; and in Ardoyne especially, where there were continuing serious difficulties in acceptance of police, the CRJI contribution was highly valued. The personal cost to their practitioners was not underestimated, and was appreciated by the police.
- 3.3 At operational level there had been a noticeable maturing of CRJI/PSNI relationships, and significant levels of trust had been developed. Community police officers and CRJI practitioners in both North Belfast and South & East Belfast were in regular contact, often on a daily basis. They both sat on local community safety fora and sub-groups that worked on the various strands of the Community Safety Strategy. Local police told Inspectors they rated CRJI as reliable and impartial.
- 3.4 The CRJI view of the PSNI was best reflected in their 2011-12 annual report which said *“There has been substantive evidence of how much the police value and rely on specific, and also, more generic interventions... Formal feedback, from both the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, has recorded the increasingly positive trend in relationships between CRJI and policing...The relationship is not superficial or cosy – rather it is based on pragmatic, honest dialogue.... Within the PSNI, local District Commanders have requested increased CRJI activity in their areas...”*
- 3.5 Police officers provided tangible examples of CRJI helping to resolve criminal issues that were harming the Ardoyne and Short Strand communities: houses that were used for selling drugs were identified and closed; and they supported local residents to engage with police in relation to burglaries, car crime and metal theft. On a wider front CRJI practitioners helped maintain equilibrium at times of internal community tensions, as well as at sectarian interfaces. The PSNI confirmed that both schemes dealt appropriately with every case of which they were aware.

- 3.6 Police officers said information from CRJI was usually accurate. It often corroborated what police already knew, but CRJI's involvement made it easier for police to intervene. One officer said *"I am protective of CRJI because it is so good."* They had no concerns about coercion or breaches of confidentiality; and they suggested the PSNI would lose considerable potential for growth if CRJI were not active in these areas.
- 3.7 The PBNI was not directly engaged with the CRJI schemes in North Belfast or South & East Belfast, but it funded the Central Office to deliver a programme with offenders elsewhere. As with all the agencies they funded, PBNI worked closely with CRJI to ensure the quality of the practice for which they were paying. They reported that CRJI would respond quickly, and that they were proactive about housing and other practical matters, as they had good contacts. They also said CRJI was meeting its requirements in relation to providing statistical feedback, and a high level of financial accountability.
- 3.8 The NIHE had a long standing relationship with CRJI in each area where its schemes operated. The Mediation and Community Support Programme which was delivered by CRJI for NIHE tenants, was regarded by the NIHE as a valuable addition to its own mediation options. The NIHE said that, while community mediation processes cannot always be neatly concluded or the outcomes readily measured, CRJI was less formal and quicker than their own mediation team, whilst the feedback and outcomes were equally good.
- 3.9 The Reducing Offending Division of the DoJ did not have any direct involvement with the North Belfast or South & East Belfast CRJI schemes. However they had funded the Central Office for several years to help build capacity, and reported an open and robust organisation which had come a long way over the past decade. Several intangible benefits of the CRJI family were evident to the DoJ, and it was content with CRJI's governance and financial probity.
- 3.10 Belfast City Council reported that CRJI was very helpful in providing accurate intelligence about local issues that fell within their remit. The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer dealt with North Belfast CRJI at the Ardoyne Forum; and Belfast City Council's neighbourhood workers in the Short Strand said the CRJI Coordinator contributed significantly in helping them deliver an effective service.
- 3.11 Sinn Féin politicians and workers spoke highly of CRJI in both the Short Strand and Ardoyne. They said the coordinators and voluntary practitioners were energetic and committed. Their contribution was valuable in bringing greater awareness of the community sector's role to statutory criminal justice bodies. Its uniqueness was explained as lying in their ability to undertake casework that linked to criminal justice themes in a way that was trusted, and more specific than the broad capacity building of more generic community organisations.
- 3.12 The SDLP maintained a negative perception of the CRJI organisation, though had no actual contact with the North Belfast or South & East Belfast schemes. They were mainly aware of them through constituents, and had nothing specific to report.
- 3.13 Service users appreciated CRJIs support – examples were provided of the North Belfast Coordinator mediating successfully in school difficulties; and a Women's Group which used CRJI to liaise with the PSNI on behalf of women who had been assaulted by husbands or partners said they fulfilled their role extremely well, and provided good confidentiality.

- 3.14 The Youth Justice Agency (YJA) had very little operational involvement with the South & East Belfast scheme. However the YJA manager for North Belfast spoke positively of the local scheme. He said that CRJI maintained high standards of integrity and confidentiality, and were professional in their approach. There were no concerns about coercion of young people. CRJI was able to provide detailed local information of which the YJA was often unaware. They would represent the community view at restorative conferences when there was no identified victim; and they identified valuable community service placements for young people.
- 3.15 Several other community workers welcomed CRJI's role in building a bridge between the community and the PSNI. In order to do so they suggested it was essential for CRJI to retain visible and accessible local bases. A Housing Association manager said CRJI was a much cheaper, more accessible and more acceptable mediation option than more formal alternatives.



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