



PROBATION PRACTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

**A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW
OF THE INSPECTION
RECOMMENDATIONS**

AUGUST 2024

**Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland**
a better justice system for all



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RECOMMENDATIONS**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
DoJ	Department of Justice
HMPPS	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PPRU	Practice, Performance and Research Unit

CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

The vision and business of the Probation Board of Northern Ireland is changing lives. To do this it relies on staff who build effective relationships with service users to achieve trust and the best outcomes to make our community safer. This ambition and ethos resonates for its own staff and how they are resourced, supported and developed to carry out their important work.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland had experienced significant changes since the full inspection with a reconstituted Board, a new Chief Executive and a restructured senior leadership team. The benefits of these were evident to Inspectors in this Follow-Up Review with improvements to organisational culture and trusted relationships. These are hard to achieve and easy to lose without constant attention and action when it is needed.

The Chief Executive and her leadership team approached the self-assessment for this Follow-Up Review in a pragmatic and honest way. As an Inspectorate, we don't always find that and it was refreshing to work with an organisation that truly reflects on its practice and recognises that there is more to be done; not only with the 2020 Inspection Report recommendations but by authentically embracing an ethos of continuous improvement.

I am impressed and encouraged by the leadership demonstrated and grip on these recommendations that have been used as a lever to drive change and improvement for service users and staff. This Follow-Up Review provides assurance and recognises what has been achieved but also what remains to be done including the further

work needed on attention to the risk of harm. I believe the Chief Executive would agree that any leader is only ever as good as the team they have around them and it is vital that everyone plays their part in sustaining improvement and growth.

I am ambitious about how the Probation Board for Northern Ireland progresses as an organisation in the future but much more importantly, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and its staff are ambitious for what their future holds and the vital services they deliver.

I am grateful to the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and Probation Service staff as well as the Department of Justice and its officials who supported this Follow-Up Review.

My thanks to Lead Inspector, Rachel Lindsay, and Inspector Maureen Erne, for carrying out this Follow-Up Review.



Jacqui Durkin

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland

August 2024

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) published a report of *Probation Practice* in December 2020.¹ The report made four strategic and six operational recommendations for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) to take forward. In addition, one strategic recommendation was addressed to the Department of Justice (DoJ) regarding the legislation and status of the PBNI.

CHANGES SINCE THE 2020 INSPECTION

In the two years following the conclusion of inspection fieldwork and the publication of the CJI report in December 2020 a number of significant changes occurred that affected the PBNI, as well as wider public services.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions from March 2020 had a significant impact on the PBNI as an organisation with front-line staff based in local offices having daily face-to-face contact with service users. Staff had to work from home in numbers never experienced before and service delivery immediately transitioned to largely being delivered remotely. Following the ending of restrictions, face-to-face delivery had resumed and hybrid working was embedded within probation practice.

The PBNI caseload reduced in 2021 due to the pandemic, but prior to this and since 2022-23 there had been a continuing upward trend. On 31 March 2020 the PBNI were managing 4,217 service users on a combined total of 4,814 orders, licences, and sentences.² On 31 March 2023, the caseload was 4,108 service users on a combined total of 5,488 orders, licences, and sentences. Provisional figures for Quarter 3 of 2023-24 showed that the caseload had surpassed the 2020 figure with 4,238 service users, on a combined total of 5,807 orders and licences under supervision by the PBNI at the end of December 2023.³ The increases in the Northern Ireland prison population and high numbers of prisoners on remand suggested that this increase would continue as the backlog of criminal cases was addressed.⁴

1 CJI, *Probation Practice in Northern Ireland: An Inspection of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, December 2020* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2020/October-December/Probation-Practice-in-Northern-Ireland>.

2 PBNI, *Annual Caseload Statistics Report 2022-23, June 2023* available at <https://www.pbni.org.uk/publication/probation-board-northern-ireland-annual-caseload-statistics-report-2022-23>.

3 PBNI, *Caseload Statistics Report Quarter Three 2023-24 (provisional in-year statistics), January 2024* available at <https://www.pbni.org.uk/files/pbni/2024-01/PBNI%20Caseload%20Statistics%20Q3%202023%2024.PDF>.

4 CJI, *The operation of bail and remand in Northern Ireland, January 2023* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2023/Jan-Mar/The-operation-of-Bail-and-Remand-in-Northern-Irela>.

A new Chief Executive took up post in October 2021. An independent organisational review was undertaken resulting in changes to the senior leadership structure. At the time of this Follow-Up Review there was an almost entirely new and different Senior Leadership Team in post to that at the start of inspection fieldwork in 2019, including two Directors of Operations, a Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and a Head of Finance. New Assistant Directors had also been appointed. In addition, a new Board was appointed by the Minister of Justice (the Minister) in March 2022.

The suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly ('the Assembly') between February 2022 and February 2024 created a period of uncertainty and budgetary pressures across public services in Northern Ireland. This had significant impacts on the PBNI with difficult decisions having to be made to balance the budget. In evidence to the Committee for Justice in March 2024⁵ the Chief Executive Officer highlighted: *'In the last 12 months, we have had a real cut to our budget of 6.1%, which has fundamentally impacted how we deliver our front-line services. The challenging budgetary position has meant that we have had to take some very difficult decisions. We have already reshaped our services, revised our practice standards, reduced our estate, cut back office posts and reduced funding to the community and voluntary sector in order to live within the available budget and maintain a focus on public safety and front-line service delivery to local communities.'*

CJI's *Probation Practice* Inspection Report noted that *'the PBNI total final resource budget in 2019-20 was £20.4 million and its opening budget for 2020-21 was £20.7 million.'* The opening PBNI budget for 2023-24 was £20.341 million, with further funding anticipated in relation to Fresh Start -Tackling Paramilitary Activity of £1.66 million.⁶ In 2023-24, £18.1 million of the PBNI's opening budget was spent on staff costs including pensions costs. A total of £2.5 million of other costs were dedicated to maintaining the PBNI estate and information technology infrastructure. The re-shaping of services included changes to programme delivery, Court reports and the Enhanced Combination Order pilot. The development of an estate strategy was planned and the PBNI were in the process of onboarding to Causeway, assisting in the sharing of information electronically from other criminal justice partners.⁷

The PBNI Corporate Plan for 2023-26 was published in July 2023.⁸ It included four strategic priorities; 'our people'; 'our services'; 'our funding'; and 'our partnerships'. There was reference to the work ongoing to address the recommendations from CJI's 2020 *Probation Practice* inspection.

5 Committee for Justice, *Official report (Hansard): Probation Board for Northern Ireland, March 2024* available at <https://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/committee-32221.pdf>.

6 PBNI, *Outcomes Framework and Year 1 Business Plan 2023-24*, internal document.

7 The Causeway Programme is a joint venture involving six key criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland, which aims to deliver significant improvements to the effectiveness and efficiency of the criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland by sharing information electronically - see <https://www.pbni.org.uk/partnership#toc-4>.

8 PBNI, *Corporate Plan 2023-26, July 2023* available at <https://www.pbni.org.uk/files/pbni/2023-09/Probation%20Board%20Corporate%20Plan%202023-26.pdf>.

At the time of the previous inspection there had been extensive work done to reform the outdated pay structure for PBNI staff. That work had progressed to the point where, at the time of this Follow-Up Review, the DoJ and Department of Finance had approved the business case for pay modernisation and implementation of the pay structure could commence. This work had been a priority for the PBNI to be able to stabilise the workforce and address the issues of staff turnover and a significant proportion of newly qualified or less experienced staff.

The PBNI had undertaken a significant amount of work in the period since the inspection which aimed to *'develop a new organisational culture taking account of trauma informed principles to help build a culture consistent with its values of respect, integrity, openness, and accountability.'*⁹ The focus on work to address the recommendations was evident in both the Corporate Plan and Year One Business Plan.

THE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

CJI requested self-assessments of progress against the Inspection Report recommendations from the DoJ (in relation to Strategic Recommendation 1) and the PBNI (in relation to Strategic Recommendations 2 to 5 as well as all six Operational Recommendations) in February 2024. Both provided an outline of actions completed to date and an assessment of progress along with supporting documentation. Inspectors were advised that the PBNI consulted widely across Senior Management, Area Managers, operational staff and Trade Unions to inform the self-assessment. The result was a comprehensive and reflective self-assessment which identified work undertaken and further actions required where recommendations were assessed as partially achieved by the PBNI. This is to be commended.

Fieldwork for this Follow-Up Review was undertaken during April 2024 and consisted of meetings with members of the Board, the Chief Executive, two Directors of Operations, Head of Human Resources, two Assistant Directors, a focus group of Area Managers and representatives of the two Trade Unions within the PBNI; the Northern Ireland Public Services Alliance and the National Association of Probation Officers. In addition, Inspectors met with a representative of the DoJ in relation to Strategic Recommendation 1 and attended a meeting of approved premises¹⁰ Managers in relation to Operational Recommendation 3.

9 *PBNI, Communication and Engagement Strategy, 2023-26, internal document.*

10 Probation approved premises are hostels for service users who need additional supervision to manage their risks to the public immediately following their release from prison.

CHAPTER 2: PROGRESS AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

The Department of Justice should review the founding legislation of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and consult on proposals for changes to its status and governance arrangements, including the required numbers of Board members, and bring forward any required legislative changes within the next Assembly mandate (paragraph 2.9).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

In 2021-22 the Department undertook a review of the PBNI's status and governance and carried out a public consultation from December 2021 to February 2022. The Minister of Justice considered the responses to the public consultation and wrote to the Chair of the Probation Board on 14 July 2022 outlining her decisions in regard to the review and consultation.

Whilst it had been the Minister's intention that legislation be brought forward in the current mandate to give effect to the proposed changes, with the hope that the changes would come into operation in advance of the next reconstitution of the Board in 2025, the collapse of the Executive in February 2022 has meant this hasn't been progressed. As things stand the amendments will not be part of the primary legislation programme for the Department in the remainder of this mandate.

Inspectors' assessment

The DoJ consultation took place between December 2021 and February 2022 and was available on the DoJ website, alongside an equality screening form, with an online response form available on Citizenspace.¹¹ A copy of the consultation document, summary of the public consultation and the letter to the PBNI Chair were provided to CJI.

The consultation document firstly considered the status of the PBNI. It outlined an assessment undertaken of the PBNI's functions against the following criteria, in line with the Department of Finance and Cabinet Office Tailored Review Guidance:

- Is this a technical function, which needs external expertise to deliver?
- Is this a function which needs to be, and be seen to be, delivered with absolute political impartiality?

¹¹ DoJ, *Consultation on review of status and governance of PBNI, December 2021* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-review-status-and-governance-pbni>

- Is this a function that needs to be delivered independently of ministers to establish facts and/or figures with integrity?

The consultation document then listed and provided an assessment of three possible options for the status of the PBNI; remain an Non-Departmental Public Body; change in status (for example to become an Executive Agency of the DoJ either on its own or through a merger with the Northern Ireland Prison Service or the Youth Justice Agency) or the PBNI and Youth Justice Agency to become a merged Non-Departmental Public Body. Based on the responses the DoJ assessment concluded that the PBNI should remain as an executive Non-Departmental Public Body.

The consultation also included the following proposals:

- the Board should comprise between eight and 10 non-executive members;
- removal of the power for the Board to co-opt members;
- removal of the statutory requirement to appoint a deputy Chair;
- replacing the term 'adequate' with an 'effective and efficient' probation service; and
- renaming the organisation 'Probation Northern Ireland.'

The summary of responses was provided to CJI but was not available online.¹² Each of the proposals as listed above received support from the majority of respondents or, in some cases, unanimous support.

The Minister wrote to the Chair of the Board in July 2022 and confirmed that the PBNI would remain a Non-Departmental Public Body, there would be no change to its status and that the proposals outlined above would be progressed. The Minister confirmed her intention to bring forward legislation later in the current Assembly mandate to give effect to the proposed changes. However, as noted in the DoJ's self-assessment, the collapse of the Assembly in February 2022 meant that this could not take place as originally planned. The DoJ advised that the legislation would not take place until after the formation of the next Assembly which would take place following an election on or before 6 May 2027. It was likely that the proposed changes would be reviewed again prior to legislation being submitted to the Assembly.

The DoJ also noted that they were aware of a potential Department of Finance Public Bodies Bill which could allow Departments to make changes to their Arm's Length Bodies' governing legislation using secondary legislation. At the time of this Follow-Up Review it was not clear if the Department of Finance would be taking forward this Bill.

The DoJ has progressed this recommendation, consulting on the key issues raised in the 2020 Inspection Report, to the point where no further action could be taken without legislative change. This change is highly unlikely to be achieved within this Assembly mandate. The Board was reconstituted in 2022 and, at the time of Follow-Up Review fieldwork, was operating with a reduced number of members who had a positive working relationship with the PBNI Senior Leadership Team.

¹² DoJ, *Summary of responses to consultation on review of PBNI status and governance, June 2022, internal document.*

The DoJ confirmed that vacant positions would be filled during the next Board appointment process, to meet the legislative requirements of Schedule 1 of The Probation Board (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 that *'the Board shall consist of a chairman, a deputy chairman, and not less than 10 nor more than 18 other members appointed by the Minister of Justice.'*¹³

It is hoped therefore that the completion of this work will be a priority during the next Assembly mandate or will be able to be achieved through secondary legislation but there is likely to be a significant delay in progressing this work.

Inspectors assessed this strategic recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should refresh its restorative justice strategy within six months of publication of this report, giving consideration to current and future opportunities for restorative practice and how these could be enhanced further to utilise the skills of probation staff and restorative justice delivery partners (paragraph 2.18).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- a revised strategy, *'Restorative Justice: Framework for Practice 2020-23,'* was approved in April 2021;
- an internal staff restorative practice forum was established (from June 2021) with inputs from external organisations;
- in March/April 2023 38 PBNI staff, in partnership with Victim Support Northern Ireland, completed *Foundation Skills in Restorative Justice*;
- discussions were ongoing with Voluntary and Community Sector Partners about restorative justice work; and
- the PBNI were reviewing and evaluating the 2020-23 Restorative Justice strategy.

Workload demands and operational challenges have meant that staff have been unable to facilitate victim-offender meetings and have focused on having restorative conversations with service users and using their restorative skills in the delivery of victim awareness programmes and reflective letters.

The PBNI assess this recommendation as partially achieved.

13 See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1982/713/schedule/1>.

Inspectors' assessment

Work to develop the Restorative Justice strategy was undertaken during 2020 with the final document, *Restorative Justice: Framework for Practice 2020-23*, approved by the Senior Leadership Team in April 2021. The revised strategy aimed to 'embed restorative practices at every stage of PBNI's work, through report-writing, community supervision, in custody, and within the delivery of community service orders.'

The internal staff forum, established in June 2021, aimed to enable staff to share practice, experience and learning to further embed restorative practices into everyday probation practice. The forum meetings had inputs from external organisations with experience in restorative practice. Inspectors heard positive feedback about the forum meetings that were maintaining a focus for those trained in restorative justice and ensuring the skills they had gained through the training were not lost. In March and April 2023, as outlined in the self-assessment, 38 PBNI staff, in partnership with Victim Support Northern Ireland, undertook multi-agency training in restorative justice. The participants, who were from Probation Officer, Probation Services Officer, Area Manager and Human Resources roles, completed the accredited programme 'Foundation Skills in Restorative Justice.'

It was positive that the use of restorative practice was more widespread across the organisation with less focus on the Victim Information Unit as being solely responsible for work between victims and individuals under PBNI supervision. References were made to a greater use of reflective letters and victim focused work as well as using restorative practice to help improve relationships between service users and their families.

It was acknowledged, however, that restorative practice was not yet fully embedded across the organisation. High levels of less experienced staff, staff turnover and workloads in some teams meant that staff did not yet have sufficient time and space within their workloads to fully realise the use and benefits of restorative practice. Further work was also required to understand the future role for restorative justice schemes within the voluntary and community sector and how the PBNI and the schemes could complement each other's work, particularly with regards to the restorative element of the Enhanced Combination Orders pilot and the *Aspire* project.

At the time of this Follow-Up Review the PBNI was in the process of reviewing and evaluating the *Restorative Justice: Framework for Practice 2020-23*. This was also intended to include the commitments for the PBNI contained in the first *DoJ Adult Restorative Justice Strategy 2022-2027*.¹⁴ The latter included case examples of restorative justice work completed by service users being supervised by the PBNI. The Strategy Action Plan included the PBNI in a number of its actions and the PBNI were a member of the restorative justice working group. The PBNI were contributing to several actions as part of the DoJ's Year 2 delivery plan for restorative justice, one of which was to explore the use of restorative practices at the point of recall.

14 DoJ, *Adult Restorative Justice Strategy for Northern Ireland 2022-2027*, March 2023 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/adult-restorative-justice-strategy-ni>.

The evidence showed that the PBNI had refreshed its restorative justice strategy as recommended and there was an improved approach to restorative practice within the organisation, with additional staff trained and the practice forum established. However, there was more work to be done to fully embed restorative practice within the organisation, to determine the direction of restorative justice within the organisation and, with community-based restorative justice organisations, to fully realise improved outcomes for service users and victims. A more stable workforce would be likely to assist in this regard.

Inspectors assessed this strategic recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should develop an action plan, within six months of publication of this report, to address the issues raised of culture and trust within the organisation (paragraph 2.29).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *the 2020-21 PBNI Business Plan set culture as a key priority with the outcome 'inclusive culture across PBNI with well-developed and motivated staff at all grades';*
- *a three-year People Strategy (2020-23) and Action Plan was designed with staff and Trade Unions;*
- *culture action-planning workshops were held with staff and Trade Unions during 2021-22. This led to the development of 'What, Why, How' suggestions and 5 priority areas were identified:*
 1. *Reviewing the mobility policy;*
 2. *Reviewing the Serious Further Offences procedures;*
 3. *Developing a hybrid working policy;*
 4. *Developing a leadership programme; and*
 5. *Focusing on career development.*
- *a focus on internal communications with Communications and Engagement Strategies developed for 2020-23 and 2023-26, including the use of Town Hall meetings, staff awards, increased visibility of senior leaders, staff consultation on the PBNI Corporate Plan 2023-26;*
- *work undertaken to develop the PBNI as a trauma-informed organisation and develop Senior Leaders;*
- *staff engagement survey shows more positive feedback from staff in general;*
- *outline business case on pay modernisation approved by DoJ, awaiting Department of Finance approval.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as partially achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors were told that this recommendation had been a key concern for the Board, the Senior Leadership Team and for staff across the PBNI. There was a unanimous view across those spoken to during fieldwork that there had been improvements in the culture and trust in the organisation. Initiatives and activities as outlined above, such as the Town Hall meetings, the increased visibility of the Senior Leadership Team and the 'open door' policy of the Chief Executive and the Directors, had led to a much more open culture where staff felt able to raise concerns or question decisions with the Senior Leadership Team and felt, in the most part, that these were listened and responded to. Board members also visited offices and offered an additional perspective on the feelings and views of the workforce.

Although the culture action plan was developed in 2020, as part of the three-year *People Strategy 2020-2023* and *People Strategy Action Plan*, it is clear and a generally accepted concept that embedding cultural change is a longer-term activity within an organisation. There was a recognition that the significant changes in the Senior Leadership Team provided an opportunity for cultural change at all levels of the organisation, but particularly at senior levels, and could and should not rest solely with the Chief Executive.

Two communications and engagement strategies had been developed since the publication of the *CJI Probation Practice* report covering the periods 2020-23 and 2023-26. In both strategies internal communications were the key focus. The latter aimed to: *'further support development of a trauma informed organisation, enhance staff engagement, help the public better understand the role of Probation in making communities safer; assist opinion formers and stakeholders understand the work of Probation and appreciate the key role Probation plays in criminal justice.'* Prior to the arrival of the current Chief Executive there was evidence collected through an internal survey that demonstrated an improvement in internal communications and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ Since then over 150 staff had been involved in the development of the PBNI Corporate Plan for 2023-26 at four engagement events and a Town Hall meeting.¹⁶ The recent establishment of a staff engagement forum, held with the Chief Executive, was welcomed by staff.

The reviews of and changes to policies and procedures had played an important role in establishing the shift in culture. The significant changes in service delivery, introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic public health restrictions, had demonstrated that the PBNI were able to maintain service delivery under hybrid working arrangements. The Hybrid Working Policy emphasised that hybrid working for any individual employee or team must not in any way detract from the PBNI's services to its service users or its relationships with its stakeholders.¹⁷ It also recognised that not every role would be

¹⁵ PBNI, *Internal Communications Survey 2020 Report*, June 2020, internal document.

¹⁶ PBNI, *Corporate Plan 2023-26*, July 2023 available at <https://www.pbni.org.uk/publication/corporate-plan-2023-26>.

¹⁷ PBNI, *Hybrid Working Policy*, August 2023, internal document.

suitable for hybrid working. Discussions had been held with stakeholders about the PBNI approach and it was intended to continue to review how it operated over the longer-term. It will be important to seek the views of sentencers, stakeholders and service users in doing so.

Similarly changes in the mobility policy (where staff were required to move teams to fill vacancies or meet the duty of care to staff in specialist areas of work) had meant that transfers of staff were, where possible, done on a voluntary basis or if not were usually managed in a better way, recognising the needs of the individual. In addition, greater flexibility was noted in the approach to moves out of specialist teams, with alternative methods used to mitigate potential harm.

The changes in procedures and approach to Serious Further Offences was positively viewed by staff and managers as a move away from what was perceived to be a punitive process with a 'fear' amongst staff to having more of a focus on learning and continuous improvement. A Practice, Performance and Research Unit (PPRU) had been established which disseminated organisational learning arising from Serious Further Offences and case audits (see Strategic Recommendation 3).

Pay modernisation continued to cause concerns for staff and undoubtedly had an impact on staff turnover, with many staff with around three to four years of experience leaving the PBNI to a better paid role in a Health and Social Care Trust. As at the time of the 2020 Inspection Report, the result of this was that experienced staff felt under pressure with balancing higher caseloads alongside providing support for less experienced colleagues. Concerns about workloads was a significant issue raised in the fieldwork, with fears about the potential risks that harm could be caused because of staff were over-stretched. The business case for the new pay structures was approved as the fieldwork for this Follow-Up Review was concluding and could therefore be implemented. It was positive that the Trade Unions had been heavily involved in the work around pay modernisation and to develop the business case. There was a recognition by all those spoken to that this would not be a 'panacea' to staff retention and turnover, but it would be a significant step in the right direction and allow the focus to be on improving other aspects of working for the PBNI which demonstrated their value. Turnover of staff within the Human Resources Department meant that it had been difficult to apply sufficient expertise and resources to issues outside of the pay modernisation project.

Work had been undertaken to develop Area Managers and members of the Senior Leadership Team, but it was reflected that there was more to be done to support those responsible for managing staff at all levels. The introduction of a Team Mentor role as a pilot was viewed positively and had helped address concerns raised in the 2020 Inspection Report about the lack of a 'Senior Practitioner' role whereby experienced staff could help develop less experienced colleagues but without moving into a formal management role. Inspectors welcome this development. Other initiatives such as supporting the professional development of staff through an Open University social work degree and the Northern Ireland Practice Teaching Training Programme were also welcomed.

The impact of these activities could be seen in the results of a Staff Engagement Survey conducted in 2023. Responses showed improvements from the 2021 survey in relation to the proportions of staff who said they were proud to work for the PBNI, could speak up and give feedback to Managers and that the PBNI had a clear purpose and aim.

However, the Staff Engagement Survey also found a reduction in the proportion of staff who said they felt valued, which was mainly linked to staff pay and being involved in organisational decision making. Lack of input to and consultation on decision making had been a key concern of staff in the 2020 inspection.

During this Follow-Up Review Inspectors heard that there was a greater focus on consulting staff about decisions, although on occasions this was undertaken later in the process than would be considered ideal. Although this was sometimes due to the need to make quick decisions in some cases there was a clear need for consultation however, because it was not done until later in the process, it delayed final decisions and was therefore counterproductive. The decisions to change the model of programme delivery and the delivery of Enhanced Combination Orders and the impact of these were noted as examples where greater consultation may have assisted in the decision-making process, particularly to recognise the impact on the ability of staff to effectively supervise service users. The Review of Administrative Support was also identified as an example of where there had been insufficient consultation with Trade Unions until conclusions had been reached. In addition, it was highlighted that Area Managers should be sighted, where possible on decisions in advance of their staff which would help them respond to questions and queries which arose.

There is evidence from all those spoken to in this Follow-Up Review that there has been a significant and concerted effort to improve culture and trust within the PBNI. Staff reported the organisation was increasingly one that was open, valued its workforce and sought and acted upon feedback. Inspectors were told it was a very different organisation with a willingness to focus on learning, rather than a fear and blame culture.

In the assessment by the PBNI of progress against this recommendation the Senior Leadership Team had recognised that there was more to do to embed the improved culture across the organisation. Inspectors acknowledge that a significant focus has been placed on this recommendation from the Board and the Senior Leadership Team with high expectations from staff. The fieldwork for this Follow-Up Review shows that there has been a great deal of activity which is having a positive impact. Pay modernisation will be an important aspect of demonstrating the value of staff and aiming to retain those with experience and skills who wish to continue working within the criminal justice system. However, Inspectors would agree that there is further work to be done to fully embed this cultural change at all levels and bring staff along with difficult decision making.

Inspectors assessed this strategic recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should develop an action plan, within three months of publication of this report to improve the quality of work to assess and manage the risk of harm to others and to ensure that management oversight includes a focus on the quality of work undertaken with service users (paragraph 3.14).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *training (some of which was mandatory) was delivered on a range of topics including Assessment, Case Management and Evaluation, risk management and risk of harm and case planning, child protection and adult safeguarding, report writing, 'professional curiosity', domestic abuse 'B-Safer' assessment tool and on the domestic homicide timeline;*
- *the PBNI Practice Standards were reviewed and revised annually from the end of 2020 onwards to reflect learning from the CJI inspection report, Serious Further Offences, Serious Case Reviews and developments in practice;*
- *new file monitoring arrangements, with a focus on quality and risk management were introduced in May 2020, the themes arising from this were used for team-based practice seminars; training for middle managers on performance management supported this work;*
- *the PPRU was established at the end of 2020 and has undertaken six major audits all of which have included a focus on assessing and managing risk of harm;*
- *Significant Risk of Serious Harm, Serious Further Offences and Domestic Abuse policy/procedures reviewed and updated;*
- *a Risk Improvement Strategy delivered to operational staff between April 2021 and April 2022 facilitated by Professor Hazel Kemshall;*
- *Practice Seminars/practitioner forums have been facilitated in each area of service delivery within teams to recap and refresh on this work. In addition, team mentors have been appointed to the majority of teams.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as partially achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

The staff training delivered since the publication of CJI's Probation Practice report has been significant and focused on the key areas in relation to risk of harm which were highlighted in the inspection. The PBNI told Inspectors that attention to risk of harm was a developing area for focus, with Assessment, Case Management and Evaluation and case plan workshops bringing much needed attention to risk of harm in addition to the usual areas of child protection, domestic abuse, sexual offending and Serious Risk of Significant Harm. In the fieldwork for this Follow-Up Review there was evidence of training

being welcomed by staff within the PBNI, with one interviewee commenting that the professional curiosity training was *'the best training course I have ever been on.'* There was agreement that there was a greater focus on the quality of the work rather than 'box-ticking'.

The PPRU audit reports were comprehensive and showed a thorough and reflective examination of Probation Officers' and Area Managers' work. Each contained a detailed description of audit findings against key areas of practice with recommendations for improvement including training, amendments to procedures and Practice Standards, management actions and dissemination of learning and positive findings to staff. Many of the findings concurred with the findings of the CJI Probation Practice report but importantly, there was evidence of improvements in practice over the period of the audits. These improvements are inevitably as a result of the increased focus by Managers and Senior Leaders on the quality of work and the significant investment in training on the issues identified by CJI's inspection and the work of PPRU, particularly in relation to risk of harm.

Recommendations made in PPRU audits between January 2021 and May 2022 were collated and achievements and outstanding actions monitored. Disappointingly, due to significant workload pressures in Probation Teams, the staff within the PPRU had to be redeployed to operational practice on several occasions and most recently in 2023. However, by the time of this Follow-Up Review the Unit had been reinstated, which was welcomed. Some concerns were raised about the decisions made in response to budget cuts to make changes to Offender Behaviour Programmes and the Enhanced Combination Order pilot (see Operational Recommendation 2) that were felt to hamper work to reduce risk of harm. These issues appeared on the PBNI's 2024 operational risk register as moderate inherent risks with residual risks of moderate (the risk from reduction in programme delivery) and low (the risk from a non-interventionist approach with Enhanced Combination Order that are over six months). The PBNI had highlighted the risks and potential impact of the decisions made to stay within budget across a number of forums. Insufficient attention to risk of harm also appeared as a risk with moderate level of both inherent and residual risk and key controls relating to some of the actions undertaken to address this recommendation.

As with Strategic Recommendation 3, the PBNI's focus on improving the quality of work to assess and manage the risk of harm will take time to deliver a sustained improvement in outcomes. The ambition of Leaders, Managers and staff was undoubtedly affected by current staffing instability and issues as well as budgetary constraints. In addition, a reduction in staff in the PPRU and Learning and Development Unit had also been a challenge.

There was evidence of a commitment to addressing the issues raised, with an indication from the PBNI of further training and audits required, but a continuing focus will be needed to fully realise these aims. The PPRU audits had provided an important assurance to the Senior Leadership Team and the Board as to the quality of practice and it is hoped

this will resume with the reinstatement of the Unit. A future inspection by CJI would incorporate a file review, as occurred during fieldwork for the 2020 inspection, which would provide an external assessment of improvements in practice.

Inspectors assessed this strategic recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

It is recommended that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland should review the effectiveness of its workforce strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose and balances the benefits of flexible working arrangements with constant service needs and effective case and risk management (paragraph 3.81).

Status: Achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *revised Flexible Working Policy implemented April 2021;*
- *Workforce Planning Group meet regularly, to provide oversight and ensure equity of flexible working arrangements; and*
- *Hybrid Working Policy implemented September 2023.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

A revised PBNI Flexible Working Policy was implemented in April 2021. The previous Remote Working Policy and Procedure had received a lot of negative feedback from staff during the previous inspection. It was subsumed into the revised Flexible Working Policy at that time, although by the time of this Follow-Up Review this had been superseded by the Hybrid Working Policy. Changes were made to address the issues raised in the CJI *Probation Practice* Inspection Report, most significantly that applications for term time working were to be made annually rather than being granted on a permanent basis.

The Hybrid Working Policy was implemented in September 2023. This incorporated learning from the experiences of remote working during the period of restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The new policy aimed to provide benefits for the PBNI's employees without detracting from service provision or relationships with stakeholders. Understandably not all job roles lent themselves to working from home and in some areas the adoption of hybrid working practices depended on the number of staff available. There had been a significant shift from the previous approach where hybrid working was agreed by exception. It will be important to continue to review the effectiveness of this approach and seek feedback on it both internally and from external stakeholders and service users.

The Terms of Reference for the existing Workforce Planning Group were revised in 2021. This Group considered bids for resources submitted by Assistant Directors or Heads of Departments and aimed to ensure that staff distribution was equitable across all teams in the PBNI.

Feedback from interviewees across the organisation suggested that there was now a more balanced approach to staffing, with less likelihood of those availing of a flexible working arrangement to be concentrated in particular teams. It was no longer a significant feature of conversations or discontent amongst staff. Inevitably the ability to work flexibly was impacted by shortages in staff teams or high workloads but it was acknowledged that work had been undertaken to address the previous causes of concern. The COVID-19 pandemic had shown that remote working could be achieved and the increased autonomy of staff and Managers to make such decisions at a team level had benefited from the improvements in culture and trust in the PBNI.

Inspectors assessed this strategic recommendation had been **achieved**.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should ensure that diversity and personal circumstances are recorded in all cases and that it continues to enhance its equality monitoring for Section 75 purposes including through better integration of equality data in assessing outcomes (paragraph 3.7).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- a new process for collection of Section 75 data implemented March 2021;
- information included on an information note for policy holders to be considered when undertaking equality screening exercises on policy decisions; and
- a Diversity Needs Assessment completed at induction with all service users.

The PBNI assess this recommendation as partially achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

As outlined in the PBNI's progress update a new process for collection of Section 75¹⁸ information was devised and implemented in March 2021. An equality monitoring form was created for Probation Officers/Probation Service Officers to ask service users to complete at the start of the intervention from the PBNI. The PBNI consulted with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in developing this approach.

18 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory obligation on public authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation. See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/section/75>.

Information in relation to age and gender was available in all cases as this information was received upon referral from the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service at the pre-sentence stage. Actions had been taken to increase completion rates over the last 12 months including engagement with staff at various events, updates and improvements to the process and regular monitoring of completion rates. The outcome of this focus was an increase in the total number of forms populated for community cases from 10% in February 2023 to 63% in February 2024. In consultation with Area Managers, the PBNI hoped to raise this figure to 75%. Inspectors were advised that there was no resistance from staff to the equality monitoring process but that the form could be overlooked as part of the induction process. Some staff would welcome more information on how the data collected is used which may then further emphasise its importance.

As this form is completed on a voluntary basis by service users it is unlikely that total completion rates will ever be 100% but the PBNI need to continue in their efforts to ensure all service users are asked to complete the form, even if they mark the form as 'decline to complete.' The significant improvement in completion rates is a positive start.

The PBNI were beginning to use this information to inform service delivery and decision making, in line with the aims of Section 75. Equality screening exercises had been undertaken in relation to a number of decisions, such as changes to programme delivery and Enhanced Combination Orders as a result of budget cuts, guidelines for working with non-English speaking service users and psychology services. It is important that the PBNI continue to monitor what impact these screening exercises, or actions arising from them, have on service delivery longer-term.

A Diversity Needs Assessment continued to be undertaken at the point of induction with all service users. Information collected, including on literacy, health, disability and caring responsibilities was an important way to tailor service delivery to individual needs. This complemented the wider monitoring of Section 75 categories and should enable more detailed analysis of outcomes across the categories.

The *Probation Practice* inspection noted that: '*Inspectors were impressed by the PBNI's commitment to understanding the outcomes of its work including through internal scrutiny of its caseload, analysis of reoffending rates, sentence completion and breach activity*' noting that it was an exemplar of good practice within the criminal justice system in this respect. The next step therefore was to use the equality information collected more extensively to analyse outcomes for service users across all the Section 75 categories. This had been recognised by the PBNI in their progress update and Inspectors were advised that the PBNI Statistics and Research Branch had added this analysis and report to their workplan for 2024-25. The planned increase in form completion rates will ensure such analysis of outcomes across the Section 75 categories is based on robust data.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should develop an action plan, within six months of publication of this report, to improve access to interventions across the organisation delivered by the probation service and commissioned service providers (paragraph 3.27).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *Action Plan was approved in December 2020;*
- *a programmes review and options paper was completed in April 2021 - proposing the formation of a combined regional programme delivery team and regional hubs for programme delivery. This was revised in line with budget and staffing constraints and in November 2021 the programme review was updated recommending that Probation Service Officers are trained and that there should be regionally delivered interventions;*
- *in line with the review, programmes and interventions are being delivered in a number of locations across Northern Ireland by the regional programmes team, the Intensive Supervision Unit programmes team and the Promoting Positive Relationships Programme team;*
- *staff training had been identified but has not progressed for all staff, including Probation Service Officers, due to budget constraints and PBNI's ability to access places on His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) training;*
- *in Summer 2023 a further review took place due to budget constraints to ensure ongoing delivery of interventions despite the adverse financial climate, the impact of this has been a reduction in programme waiting lists and intervention delivery more agile;*
- *a programme evaluation framework was developed in March 2021 and updated in 2022;*
- *PBNI Psychology has been reviewed and has moved from an on-demand service to a referral and triage pathway - there is currently no waiting list for psychology assessment;*
- *a review of PBNI Community and Voluntary Sector Funding Policy and Procedures in 2021 made several strategic recommendations to improve its impact service users' rehabilitation journey - these have improved what PBNI receive as service commissioners;*
- *a guide to PBNI Programmes and Interventions was created and updated in September 2023 which outlines suitability criteria and referral pathways; and*
- *further work is required to address this recommendation fully - although updates have been provided to staff there is still a need for a communication plan to ensure all staff remain aware of programme developments, review of changes to programme delivery in response to budget cuts, work remains ongoing to capture data regarding completion of brief interventions.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as partially achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

The Action Plan for this recommendation was developed and approved in December 2020. This included three actions, led by the Assistant Director for Programmes and Interventions, which were to be delivered by March 2021. The actions included a review of programmes and interventions, the design of a guide to programmes including criteria and referral pathway and a review of access to commissioned services.

Review of programmes and interventions and design of a guide to programmes including criteria and referral pathway

A review was completed in April 2021 and proposed the formation of a combined Regional Programme Delivery Team and regional hubs for programme delivery. This work overlapped with actions taken to address Operational Recommendation 5 in relation to the case management model and particularly the role of Probation Service Officers. In line with budget and staffing constraints plans had been subject to a number of reviews and revisions of the original plan.

There was evidence in documentation provided to CJI that progress against this recommendation had been monitored and reviewed at the PBNI Rehabilitation and Operations meeting during the period since the recommendation was made. Staff were informed in writing of the most recent changes to programme delivery in October 2023 and a revised intervention pathway. This included an explanation that difficult decisions had been made due to the budget allocation.

Broadly speaking, at the time of this Follow-Up Review the changes that had been made had the greatest impact on those assessed as being low or medium/moderate risk. The review of programmes, although not specifically excluding delivery to medium/moderate risk individuals, recommended that the PBNI should prioritise delivery to higher risk service users first, where staff were advised, based on research that programmes have the greatest impact, as well as allowing better use of staff resources. This meant there was a greater likelihood of medium/moderate service users being required to complete a one-to-one individual intervention and low-risk service users were not to be referred to group programmes. This had particularly been challenging with the significant increases in service users sentenced for or with a previous history of domestic violence or abuse. A Domestic Abuse Interventions Panel had been established, chaired by the Principal Psychologist, to make decisions about which intervention best meets the service user's needs by considering a range of risk, need and responsivity criteria. Documentation provided to CJI evidenced that individual intervention packs had been created for staff to use to deliver individual intervention work and Probation Officers were advised on the wording to be used in Court or licencing Panels when recommending groupwork programmes.

Across the organisation there was an acknowledgement that the decisions made around programmes were far from ideal and were only taken in the face of budgetary pressures. There were mixed views about the impact of these decisions. Some staff outlined the important effect of groupwork on service users and the resulting increase in workload on

staff who were now required to undertake a greater number of individual interventions with service users. Others however emphasised the value of one-to-one work and how this approach could assist those had previously experienced difficulties with accessing and ensuring continued participation of service users on group programmes, particularly in rural areas as outlined in CJI's *Probation Practice* report. Ultimately it is important that Probation Officers and Probation Service Officers work with service users to address their offending behaviour, whether they attend a groupwork programme or not.

Inspectors were advised that there had been some delays in receiving sufficient information about the decisions made by the Senior Leadership Team and the resulting changes to criteria and referral pathways. The latest version of the PBNi *Guide to Group Work Programmes & Individual Interventions* had been provided to staff and made available on the intranet in March 2024. The timing was to some extent understandable given the need for the PBNi to respond to the changing budget situation but the delay in providing the guide inevitably caused concerns and uncertainty for some staff. Intervention forums had been established to assist staff to deliver high quality interventions.

An evaluation framework for Offender Behaviour Programmes was developed in 2021, with a revised version available from March 2022. This was intended to fill a gap in evaluative research about the efficacy of group work and individual programmes in the Northern Ireland context. The framework aimed to provide data collection, monitoring and evaluation procedures for programmes and interventions delivered by the PBNi. It was intended that the outputs of this framework would be an annual report of management information and compliance with PBNi Practice Standards, a process evaluation to demonstrate programme integrity, reoffending analysis/outcome analysis to establish the overall impact of programmes on reoffending and a cost/benefit analysis.

Evaluations on some groupwork programmes relating to domestic abuse had already been undertaken with plans to evaluate the 2023-24 programmes for men with sexual convictions and the Thinking Skills programme when they had concluded. Such work will help inform some of the discussions ongoing within the PBNi workforce about the value of different programmes and interventions. Inspectors were told however that HMPPS planned to review and change its offering of accredited programmes, moving away from separate offence focussed programmes to a generic thinking/decision-making intervention. It was envisaged this would lead to further changes to programme delivery by the PBNi as well as a requirement for further training. In addition, the PBNi were reviewing how they could further address the needs of those in the medium risk category through programme delivery.

Feedback in relation to Psychology Service provision was also mixed, but there was an acknowledgment that the new ways of working were 'embedding.' It was intended that the Psychology Service would be targeted at those with greatest need and risk. Under the revised approach it was recognised that there was better oversight with the ability for the Principal Psychologist to intervene where access to an intervention was delayed.

The Principal Psychologist had also issued memos to staff advising them of the changes in both the Psychology Service and programme delivery since coming into post at the end of 2022. Ultimately some staff would welcome more input from psychology colleagues, rather than just the provision of advice, but there was a recognition that the finite resources available had to be focused on the most complex cases.

Access to commissioned services

The report of the review of the PBNI Community and Voluntary Sector Funding Policy and Procedures in 2021 was comprehensive and indicated that feedback had been sought from the PBNI Senior Management Team, the Area Manager group, PBNI's main project providers and a small sample of service users. In common with other public services, budgetary constraints had a significant impact on the PBNI's funding of community and voluntary sector bodies and directions given by the DoJ to stop discretionary spending during 2023-24. The effect of this was that there was an in-year decision to cease funding for the community and voluntary sector which was then re-started with extra funding being received part way through the year. As a result, the PBNI spent £479,781 of this funding compared to anticipated 2023-24 financial year spend of £578,489. In January 2024 a paper was presented to the Senior Leadership Team on funding decisions for voluntary and community sector services for the period from 2024-28. This was approved but continued to be dependent on sufficient budget being available. The precarious and uncertain budgetary position continued to create challenges for both the PBNI and their community and voluntary sector partners.

Inspectors were advised that budget allocations were informed by the completion of an equality assessment across the urban and rural areas to provide equity of access to services. It was a key aspect of services commissioned by the PBNI that there was equality of access for all Probation Teams. However, there was still a general sense that Probation Teams within the Greater Belfast area benefited from a broader range of services available in the community than those in more rural areas for a number of reasons. Staff concerns related more to programme delivery changes and the cuts to voluntary and community sector funding that were felt universally across the PBNI. This issue would therefore likely form part of the focus of a future inspection when the referrals, uptake and evaluation of outcomes to interventions would be examined.

There is no doubt that in the time since the fieldwork for the *Probation Practice* inspection concluded there has been a significant focus on the delivery of interventions, but budgetary constraints meant the Senior Leadership Team had to make very difficult decisions in this area that were endorsed by the Board. With the benefit of hindsight, the PBNI Senior Leadership Team reflected that different decisions might have been made on the delivery of interventions given the additional monies provided very late in the 2023-24 financial year. Despite this there had been efforts by Leaders, Managers and staff to continue to deliver high quality interventions and support service users through partnership working. There had also been efforts to assess the impact of the decisions made, albeit that evaluation of many outcomes is not available for many months, or possibly years, after decisions have been made.

There was still work to do to ensure effective delivery of interventions and ensure staff can make informed decisions on the best intervention for the service user. It is likely that fiscal considerations and challenges, as well as changes to HMPPS programmes, will require a continued focus on this recommendation over future years.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should, within six months of publication of this report, review the effectiveness of its approach to information sharing with partner organisations who provide services at approved premises to ensure:

- the appropriateness of the data sharing procedures/Memorandums of Understanding in place;
- the appropriateness of referral forms and guidance documentation used;
- any outstanding staff awareness and training needs are met;
- compliance by relevant staff with the procedures in place; and
- that operational risk registers reflect the organisational risks of information sharing or failing to share information and the personal information held.

It should be ensured that the information sharing approaches meet the needs of these partner organisations in respect of their service delivery and public protection responsibilities (paragraph 3.47).

Status: Achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *Memorandum of Understandings and Data Sharing Agreements with approved premises were reviewed and updated in 2021 and January 2024;*
- *Data protection training for PBNI managers and practitioners developed;*
- *Guidance note circulated December 2020 including criteria for referral and application/referral process;*
- *Referral/application form revised December 2020 and February 2024;*
- *PBNI Area Manager for approved premises delivered guidance to staff in prisons/Belfast/Rural team meetings/Prisoner Development Unit staff/induction;*
- *Compliance pro-forma developed for approved premises Managers (circulated October 2019-December 2021) and deficits identified addressed at weekly hostel panel;*
- *Secure email in place with approved premises Managers; and*
- *PBNI risk register updated to reflect risks.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

In October 2019, in response to CJI regular monitoring visits and inspections of Probation approved premises,¹⁹ the PBNi introduced a monthly reporting system for approved premises Managers to facilitate reporting of any information deficits. In January 2020, in consultation with approved premises Managers, hostel referral forms were refreshed.

In December 2020, a guidance note was issued to all operational staff setting out the criteria for referring a service user to an approved premises and the application/referral process. The guidance emphasised the need to provide relevant and appropriate information for the management of risk and extract information from other documents where available (for example Pre-Sentence Reports). CJI's 2023 Inspection Report of approved premises,²⁰ found that while the quality of information provided to approved premises had improved, the arrangements at that time were not fully satisfactory. The guidance for staff was revised and circulated to staff again in July 2023.

The approved premises Application Form was revised and implemented in December 2020, with a further revision in February 2024, to ensure that all necessary information was being provided to approved premises Managers and staff. Both, this form and the guidance note, stated that Application Forms would not be accepted if they were not completed comprehensively or did not clearly identify the risk needing to be managed by being in an approved premises with reference to the index offence and/or previous offending. Secure email was in place with approved premises Managers and therefore names of service users on forms no longer needed redaction.

Monitoring the quality of completed Application Forms was facilitated both through asking approved premises Managers to identify deficits at the weekly hostel panel meeting or by returns on a pro forma which was shared between October 2019 to December 2021. The circulation of this pro forma ended once there had been a satisfactory improvement in the information being provided to approved premises, and a number of months of nil returns from Managers.

Memorandums of Understanding and Data Sharing Agreements with approved premises were reviewed and updated in 2021 to ensure that appropriate levels of information sharing were taking place to meet the needs of approved premises, in compliance with Data Protection law. The Memorandums of Understanding were further updated in January 2024.

Staff were required to engage in annual data protection training and there had been support and guidance provided by the PBNi Compliance Unit as well as the PBNi Area Manager with operational responsibility for approved premises providing inputs to operational teams and to new staff induction.

19 Probation approved premises are hostels for service users who need additional supervision to manage their risks to the public immediately following their release from prison - see previous reports on CJI's website www.cjini.org.

20 CJI, *A Review of Probation approved premises in Northern Ireland: A Review of how effectively Probation approved premises contribute to Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Public Protection Outcomes in Northern Ireland, March 2023* available at [https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2023/Jan-Mar/A-Review-of-Probation-Approved-Premises-in-Nor-\(1\)](https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2023/Jan-Mar/A-Review-of-Probation-Approved-Premises-in-Nor-(1))

The operational risk register was updated to reflect the organisational risks of information sharing or failing to share information. The 2024 operational risk register included a risk that *'approved accommodation is unavailable'* and this contained a key control that data sharing agreements were in place with approved premises.

Feedback from approved premises Managers was very positive in relation to the action taken to address this recommendation. Inspectors were advised that secure email had resulted in significant benefits for staff, resulting in the ability to share service users' names and relevant details on the referral form as well as Probation Officers responding to queries or requests for further information. Approved premises Managers confirmed that they were satisfied with the information shared with them and that there were no longer instances where Probation Officers refused to share information. Positively, in addition to information provided from Pre-Sentence Reports and on the service user's offending history, it was noted that there were examples of where information had been provided on Adverse Childhood Experiences that supported the trauma-informed approach of the approved premises. The issue of incomplete forms lacking in detail was no longer a feature of meetings between approved premises Managers and the PBNI.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation had been **achieved**.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should engage with partners in the health and social care sector to develop arrangements for the sharing of information between probation and health and social care colleagues, in relation to service user engagement with statutory services for mental health and substance misuse issues. This work should commence within three months of publication of this report (paragraph 3.56).

Status: Achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *work undertaken to develop Data Sharing Agreements between the PBNI and five Health and Social Care Trusts - overarching Data Sharing Agreement signed and effective from June 2023;*
- *meetings held with Directors of Mental Health November 2020 - March 2021 and presentation by PBNI to Directors of Mental Health, Addictions, Learning Disability Services January 2021;*
- *Data Sharing Agreement developed with Community Forensic Mental Health Teams - currently being reviewed;*
- *staff advised of arrangements and referral/treatment pathways - no issues reported;*
- *importance of sharing information reinforced during risk training;*

- *PBNI working with Public Health Agency and Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group to ensure substance misuse needs are adequately addressed - stakeholder event held January 24; and*
- *workshop held February 2024 on Substance Use and Criminal Justice Pathways - will further enhance data sharing protocols.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

The overarching Data Sharing Agreement was signed in June 2023 by the Medical Directors of the five Health and Social Care Trusts and the PBNI Director of Operations. Its purpose was agreed as the following:

- to facilitate the exchange of personal data and other information required to carry out assessments on people who come into contact with the PBNI;*
- to enable PBNI to effectively carry out its statutory functions to supervise Court Orders and Licences and complete Pre- Sentence Reports;*
- to enable people who come into contact with the PBNI to access appropriate services which fall under the remit of the Health and Social Care Trusts;*
- to ensure that all information sharing between the parties is carried out in the most efficient way, while remaining fair and lawful in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and Data Protection Act 2018;*
- to ensure that effective lines of communication exist and are maintained between the parties to enable the sharing of relevant and timely information; and*
- to ensure that both parties comply with legal obligations.*

This was the culmination of a significant amount of work by both organisations, initiated by the PBNI in response to CJI's recommendation. Engagement work had been undertaken within Health and Social Care Trusts to build awareness of the role of the PBNI and develop linkages between the organisations.

From late 2020 to 2021 meetings were held with the Health and Social Care Trusts Directors of Mental Health, including a presentation by the PBNI to the Directors of Mental Health, Addictions and Learning Disability Services. As a result of these engagements a specific Data Sharing Agreement was developed between the PBNI and Community Forensic Mental Health Teams to facilitate sharing of information on individuals currently or previously in contact with the PBNI through a statutory supervision Order or Licence and had been assessed as having a mental illness or mental disorder as defined by the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. However, when the overarching Data Sharing Agreement was signed in June 2023, it was mutually agreed that this was all that was necessary and sufficient.

PBNI staff training had included a focus on the importance of information sharing, including the escalation procedures to be utilised where issues arose. The PBNI advised that they were continuing to work with partners in health regarding effective support for those service users with substance misuse needs.

Inspectors heard from staff that there had been some examples of individual staff within the Health and Social Care Trusts being unaware that they could share information but that the mechanism was now in place to request information. There is clearly an onus on the leadership of the Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure their staff are aware about their responsibilities to share information but importantly Probation Officers can rely on the Data Sharing Agreement as the basis for sharing and escalating issues that arise.

The Data Sharing Agreement covered the work of the five Health and Social Care Trusts but did not extend to primary care provided by General Practitioners who operate as independent practitioners. Similarly to the 2020 inspection report findings some difficulties were reported in accessing information from General Practitioners depending on local relationships and individual approaches. The PBNi may wish to target further engagement activities at General Practitioner professional bodies or forums to address this gap.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation had been **achieved**.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 5

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should ensure that the outcomes of the case management model review are delivered within six months of publication of this report with regard to:

- the need for a more consistent approach to the delivery of the case management model across the community teams;
- clarity for probation staff and managers about the roles of the Probation Officer, Probation Service Officer and administrative support and sufficient resource to fulfil these roles; and
- a communication strategy to ensure effective staff engagement where concerns are actively listened to as well as highlighting case examples where positive outcomes have been achieved through the case management model approach (paragraph 3.63).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNi provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *review of case management model completed June 2020 - confirmed model was not operating as it should be - recommendations made and implemented;*
- *programme Review completed 2021 (see Operational Recommendation 2) which recommended that split function for Probation Service Officers (programme delivery and case management/team support) be discontinued;*
- *single function Probation Service Officers introduced in 2022 and case management model, as initially designed, discontinued - restructuring of Probation Service Officers to either dedicated programme delivery or case support;*

- *training need exists in Probation Service Officers grade as a high proportion are not programme trained;*
- *reduced referral rate for programmes suggested four Probation Service Officers is over what is needed;*
- *2023 review of Probation Service Officers model - confirmed model and numbers required to deliver programmes and brief interventions and team support - has addressed lack of clarity;*
- *inclusion of Probation Service Officers role in Practice Standards;*
- *no specific communication strategy but staff engaged, consulted and communicated with during each review;*
- *programme delivery remains under review given changes in programme delivery/ budget constraints;*
- *practice seminars for programme delivery/brief interventions commenced Feb 2024;*
- *programme training is required for all Probation Service Officers.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as partially achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

As part of the PBNI Workforce Modernisation Programme a case management model was devised, piloted and implemented in July 2018 *'to ensure roles and duties were fulfilled by the correct grades of staff and programmes were more integrated with case management. The aim was to ensure PBNI continued to deliver an effective service whilst at the same time realising savings.'*²¹ The case management model focused on the roles and responsibilities of Probation Officers and Probation Service Officers, in relation to group programmes, one-to-one individual interventions and supervision and support to service users.

In November 2019, when fieldwork for CJI's inspection of *Probation Practice* was nearing completion, the outcomes of an interim evaluation of the case management model was shared with Area Managers. This included recommendations that had been accepted by the PBNI Workforce Modernisation Programme Board. A final review of the model was concluded in June 2020. Difficulties were identified with the existing approach and recommendations for improvement were made but the 'split' role of Probation Service Officers across both the Programme Team (delivering group programmes) and Community Teams (delivering individual brief interventions and case support) continued to be a challenge.

In April 2021 a review of group programmes (see Operational Recommendation 2) led to the formation of a combined Regional Programme Delivery Team and regional hubs for programme delivery. It was recommended therefore that the split role of Probation Service Officers across the Programmes Team and Community Teams should discontinue. In 2022, in response to this, Probation Service Officers became dedicated to either programme delivery in the Programmes Team or case support in Community Teams, which included delivering brief interventions. Staffing issues and difficulties and training

21 *PBNI, Review of PBNI Case Management Model, June 2020, internal document.*

needs within the Probation Service Officer workforce had impeded the smooth transition to this new delivery arrangement.

A further review of the Probation Service Officer function including the single function model of practice was completed in September 2023. The review confirmed the model and identified numbers of required dedicated staff to deliver programmes across the organisation and dedicated Probation Service Officers to deliver brief interventions and team support, based in local teams, who report to and are supervised by the team Area Manager. The Probation Service Officer role had been included in the PBNI's Practice Standards. This provided clarity and clear direction on the roles and responsibilities for staff, especially where Probation Service Officers undertook the case support role of supervision alongside Probation Officers.

Feedback was positive in relation to the integration of Probation Service Officers in Community Teams. It was acknowledged that the new model was still being embedded but that the joint working between Probation Officers, Probation Service Officers and Administrative Officers was critical to its success. One Intensive Supervision Unit was piloting the Probation Service Officer role within their team, and this was viewed positively with significant benefits.

It was highlighted to Inspectors that a review of the PBNI administration function had the potential to negatively impact on the success of the model if it resulted in less administrative support being available to support Case Work Teams. The review report, completed in December 2023, outlined that there was potential to reduce the numbers of administrative staff overall across the organisation. This included both a reduction in numbers of staff required in some teams or offices but also an uplift or reallocation of resource to others. It was intended that the outcomes of the review would ensure a wider skills base of staff to undertake Court processing as well as moving some staff to fill existing vacancies.

The evidence base for this work considered changes to the administrative processes required within the PBNI (for example reduction in administrative work as a result of changes to human resources and finance systems and the extension of the Causeway Programme to include the PBNI), implementation of hybrid working, as well as feedback from staff across the organisation. However, there was a view that the Trade Unions had not been sufficiently consulted to inform the evidence base. Recommendations were accepted by the PBNI and were being implemented at the time of report drafting. It will be important for the PBNI to continue to monitor the impact of the roll-out of these changes and ensure that the reduction in administrative support does not have a detrimental effect on the delivery of work of Probation Officers or Probation Service Officers.

Inspectors were advised that, in some cases, Probation Service Officers who were involved in programme delivery still felt as if they reported to two Managers, with potentially conflicting demands on their time, despite guidance being issued to clarify that line

management responsibility fell to the community Area Manager. This was largely down to the need for the specific programme-related role Treatment Manager to be performed by the Programmes Teams. Staff shortages were also highlighted in relation to this recommendation as having an impact on service delivery.

Review documents indicated that feedback had been sought from staff in Probation Service Officer, Probation Officer and Area Manager roles. Inspectors were advised that communication with staff focused on addressing the concerns as opposed to highlighting case examples with positive outcomes, as included in CJl's recommendation. Some staff felt that consultation and information sharing could have been improved during the review processes.

The PBNI acknowledged that work still needed to be done to provide training to those Probation Service Officers working in the Programmes Team, as well as develop those in community teams through practice seminars. As outlined in Operational Recommendation 2 programme delivery remained under review due to the impact of budgetary considerations and subsequent changes in programme criteria and delivery.

It had taken some time and a number of reviews to deliver this recommendation and determine how best to use the resources and skills of the Probation Service Officer role. Since the outcomes of the 2023 review the delivery model had been agreed and implemented. It is important that this is now embedded further with a consistent approach across the PBNI teams to fully realise the benefits of the partnership working between Probation Officers, Probation Service Officers and administrative support.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 6

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland should review the community team workload measurement giving further consideration to:

- the active caseload ratios that change a caseload from acceptable (green) to an alert (amber or red);
- how the complexity or risk levels of cases could be reflected in the active caseload; and
- the options available to address amber or red caseloads and how these can be utilised to address caseloads held by individuals or teams (paragraph 3.67).

Status: Partially achieved.

Organisational response

The PBNI provided information and supporting documentation to confirm actions taken in respect of this recommendation. These actions can be summarised as follows:

- *Consultation process to review workload measurement approach began January 2021 with staff and Trade Unions;*
- *Feedback received that current approach did not work - red/amber/green discontinued while current workload management tool devised;*
- *Development of new Workload Management Tool using points based system - consultation and benchmarking undertaken - June 2021 consultation paper on new tool;*
- *Implementation of new system with output info provided to Area Managers by Statistics and Research every month;*
- *First version of Workload Management Tool circulated and further developed based on Trade Union feedback until March 22;*
- *Live version implemented April 2022 with a nine-month pilot for feedback - further revisions undertaken;*
- *Agreed consistent practice standards deviations introduced August 2022 (revised February 2024);*
- *Workload Management Tool will be subject to ongoing refinement;*
- *Area Managers broadly welcome current Workload Management Tool but some staff continue to have concerns that it doesn't reflect intricacies of daily work demands - further meetings planned with Trade Unions and Area Managers plus guidance and training on using the tool.*

The PBNI assess this recommendation as achieved.

Inspectors' assessment

At the time of CJI's 2020 *Probation Practice* inspection the PBNI were utilising a 'community team workload measurement', a caseload ratio mechanism which was used to assess the Probation Officer resource required in community teams depending on the level of risk associated with cases in the workload. A traffic light system was used to highlight acceptable active caseloads as green, then amber where an individual team member's caseload reached a certain level which alerted the Area Manager to take steps to reallocate work within the team and finally red where, for a period of four weeks or more, the caseload of 75% or more of the team exceeded the set number, alerting the Area Manager that immediate action must be taken.²²

In response to the recommendation an initial consultation process commenced in January 2021 with staff and Trade Unions on a workload management approach for Community Teams based on a 'graded response' system that built upon an existing tool with set and agreed responses to staffing vacancies. Principles of workload management and workload assumptions were shared which were used to ascertain the required

²² See CJI's inspection of Probation Practice for further details available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2020/October-December/Probation-Practice-in-Northern-Ireland>.

establishment figures (the Probation Officer resource required for each team.) Significant feedback was received that the traffic light system did not properly reflect workload trends, capacity nor complexity and did not adequately address the needs of teams when staffing fell below the establishment level (the number of staff employed on a full-time equivalent basis). This feedback, themes and suggested responses were presented in a paper to the Senior Leadership Team in March 2021.

A decision was taken to discontinue the traffic light system and devise a new workload management tool ('the tool'). This drew on consultation and benchmarking with other Probation Services as well as collation of data to provide the associated workload output. A consultation paper setting out a revised approach for workload management in all areas of PBNi business, excluding custody and programmes work, was produced in June 2021. This proposed a tool based on a points system, where different types of work or cases would be allocated points, depending on the amount of work normally required. The amount of work was based on that set by the PBNi Practice Standards (in relation to contact levels and risk levels). Complexity was defined by the Assessment and Case Evaluation assessment and, unlike its predecessor, it was proposed that the tool be used for areas of specialism beyond the work of Intensive Supervision Unit specialist teams (for example, supervising service users in hostels, the *Aspire* project²³ and life licensees). The tool was also able to allocate different numbers of points for those working a reduced working pattern, periods when staff were on leave and those in their first year of employment after their social work qualification.

An activity analysis was conducted during Summer 2021 to refine the accuracy of points awarded for the preparation for Court reports. This involved asking for information from Probation Officers about the time taken to produce various report types, analysis of average time taken and consideration of the effect of outlier data. The resulting outcome was an increase in the number of points originally proposed for report writing. In this example therefore the points allocation was evidence-based with a rationale for changes made which responded to staff feedback.

The first version of the workload measurement tool was circulated in December 2021. This noted: *'The tool is a significant attempt to provide empirical evidence of workloads whilst still being aware of context and other issues, and therefore will provide a basis for discussions between staff and management, rather than be rigidly interpreted.'*²⁴ It emphasised that the tool in no way negated the Area Manager's responsibility for allocating work based on the individual Probation Officer's circumstances. The tool was then subject to amendments based on feedback from the Trade Unions, addressing issues such as annual leave and travel time, until its implementation in April 2022.

23 The PBNi's *Aspire* Programme was launched in 2017 to help support young men who are at risk of becoming involved or risk of being further involved in criminal behaviours.

24 PBNi, *Workload Measurement Tool (WMT) (Probation Officer grade) v1.0, December 2021, internal document.*

From April 2022 a nine-month pilot took place to seek ongoing feedback and undertake further revisions of the tool. A working group assisted with this. The PBNI's Electronic Case Management System recorded work completed by Probation Officers which was then awarded the appropriate level of points for the task. Data was collated and each month the PBNI Statistics and Research Team issued an output report showing the application of points of individual Probation Officers and the overall team. This was to enable Area Managers to review the workload of individual Probation Officers against the point expectation and allocate work to those who had capacity. In accordance with the guidance, a certain level of excess points over a period of time then resulted in action being taken to deviate from Practice Standards or seek alternative solutions (such as reallocation of work to different teams).

At the time of fieldwork therefore the establishment figure for teams were based on workload measurement tool points with the principles of effective workload management agreed. In August 2022 agreed consistent deviations from PBNI Practice Standards were introduced for consideration and linked to staff vacancy levels to avoid additional pressure on remaining staff. The deviations were revised in February 2024 in light of continued challenges arising from staffing levels. Area Managers were given the autonomy to implement the agreed deviations without seeking approval from Assistant Directors. Agreed deviations were clearly set out for circumstances of up to 10%, 20%, 40% and 60% reduction on Probation Officer establishment level figures for Pre-Sentence Reports and each case type. The agreed deviations were designed so that service users presenting with assessed higher risk and therefore complexity retained more frequent contact to ensure safe practice. Pre-Sentence Court Reports were also prioritised to prevent sentencing delay and ensure victim and public confidence. The staffing issues outlined earlier in this report had a continuing significant impact on the use of deviations. It will be important to continue to monitor and assess the impact of different types and levels of deviations.

There was universal agreement during fieldwork that the workload measurement tool was better than the previous traffic light system. Some frustrations were raised that the consultation processes could have been better at the initial stages of design. Staff were of the view that there had been issues with the appropriate allocation of points from the Electronic Case Management System and therefore that this demonstrated issues with the technology used for the tool. Inspectors were however advised that where a piece of work such as a report was allocated to a different team due to workload pressures, a process was undertaken afterwards to ensure the original team were allocated points for the subsequent work. This process was undertaken based on information from Area Managers and this was important so that the likely workload of the team going forward was accurately calculated.

However, for some staff this had negatively impacted on their confidence that the tool was an accurate reflection of their workload. It was felt by some staff that feedback could have been responded to earlier and that this had left some staff with a feeling of a distrust of the figures. There was continued concern from some staff about the appropriateness

of the tool for cases supervised by the Intensive Supervision Units with further discussions to be held with the Assistant Director with responsibility for the tool to try and resolve the issues. The length of time taken to develop the tool and number of revisions to it demonstrated that there was a desire by the PBNI to ensure its accuracy and effectiveness, but some staff were frustrated by ongoing issues with the information technology and points allocation.

There were also positive examples of how the tool was being used proactively by Area Managers to allocate work across their teams and to make the case for additional resources or deviations from PBNI Practice Standards. Due to the agreed deviations Area Managers no longer felt powerless to make decisions about managing their own workloads and this had addressed issues raised previously that excessive workloads were not addressed despite being amber or red. However, there was still concerns that some teams had resorted to significant deviations whereas others were operating fully in accordance with Practice Standards.

The PBNI recognised that there is still work to be done to fully embed the tool, build confidence in its use and particularly to develop and support Area Managers to make best use of the information provided to them. Further, there is more work to be done to ensure consistency of message that the tool will *'form the basis for discussions between staff and management, rather than be rigidly interpreted'* to assure staff and managers that the tool is not the sole piece of evidence used to make staffing decisions during the year. The tool continued to be raised with the Senior Leadership Team and Board members and a further evaluation may be appropriate in future. The PBNI also reflected that the tool will continue to be an ongoing, iterative process that seeks to refine categories of points in line with any changes to Practice Standards.

Although it was reflected that there was more work required to refine the tool and a further period of time is needed before it is fully embedded, it was positive that, despite the concerns raised above, there was a desire from some Area Managers to have a workload measurement tool for their grade. There was a feeling that increased workloads, of both the volume of cases supervised by Probation Teams, but also additional duties of Area Managers such as chairing meetings in relation to public protection issues, case monitoring, staff performance management and business and administrative activities, could be recognised more effectively by the use of a similar tool. At a time when the PBNI was under considerable financial pressures, the tool provided a means for the organisation to establish a sound evidence-base which underlined the need for additional funding to ensure safe practice. It also enabled the Board to have oversight of deviations from Practice Standards.

Inspectors believe that the PBNI have been able to develop a tool which has the potential to be an important piece of evidence to assist in making resourcing decisions and taking action to address workload pressures. It is positive that the workload measurement tool was unanimously viewed within the organisation as a more effective method of assessing workloads than the previous system. There have been challenges with the

implementation of the tool and, at the time of Follow-Up Review fieldwork, there is still some work to be done to ensure it is fully reflective of staff workloads and that there is confidence within the Probation Officer workforce of the accuracy and efficacy of the tool. A consistent understanding and approach as to how the tool was to be used by Managers would also be helpful. Inspectors are confident that the remaining issues can be addressed in the coming months to achieve this recommendation.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation had been **partially achieved**.

CHAPTER 3: **CONCLUSION**

Since the conclusion of inspection fieldwork, the recommendations of the *CJI Probation Practice* report in December 2020 have been a significant focus for the PBNI. Evidence has been provided of action to address recommendations from late 2019 through to the time of this Follow-Up Review. Both the Board and the Senior Leadership Team have identified some of the key issues arising from the Inspection as priorities for the organisation, reflected in the Corporate and Business Plans, as well as papers for internal meetings. Inspectors welcome the commitment shown by the PBNI in working towards the recommendations.

Inspectors have assessed that, of the five strategic recommendations, one has been achieved and four have been partially achieved and that, of the six operational recommendations, two have been achieved and four have been partially achieved. Inspectors therefore agree with the balanced and frank assessment of progress provided by the PBNI in all but one recommendation.

Of those recommendations that have been partially achieved it is recognised that some are longer-term and will take time to embed, such as those relating to the issues of culture and trust and to improving the quality of work to address risk of harm. Inspectors believe that the PBNI is moving forward positively with this work and are already beginning to see the benefits of their efforts. The legislative changes required to achieve Strategic Recommendation 1 have also been delayed by the absence of the Assembly and a slot on a legislative programme.

In other areas there has been a significant amount of work undertaken but efforts to establish new approaches or models of practice have been hindered by the ongoing issues of pay modernisation, an unstable workforce and budgetary challenges with the need to make difficult decisions to manage within available resources. There is no doubt that staff feel that the PBNI is a better place to work than when Inspectors undertook inspection fieldwork in 2019. There is still work to be done to ensure all staff feel engaged, consulted and valued. Although decisions sometimes have to be taken quickly this does not mean that every effort should not be undertaken to keep staff informed and consulted through the mechanisms of their Trade Unions and other consultation channels.

The ultimate assessment of the decisions taken regarding programme delivery and Enhanced Combination Orders, will be the evaluation of short, medium and longer-term outcomes for individual service users, the PBNI and the wider criminal justice system, such as sentence completion and breach rates, recalls and reoffending data. It is important that the PBNI begins this evaluation at the earliest opportunity and use this as an evidence base for future budgetary discussions. A future inspection by CJI will also examine the longer-term impact of actions taken to address the issues of culture and trust and quality of work to address the risk of harm, as well as looking more closely at the four key areas of probation casework, assessment, planning, implementation and delivery and reviewing.

The PBNI has demonstrated that it continues to be a learning organisation with leaders and staff focussed on and striving to deliver high quality work and manage and support service users effectively to address the risk of harm to the public. Inspectors would encourage the PBNI to continue on the journey it has begun, focus on its core values and build an embedded culture consistent with its values of respect, integrity, openness, and accountability.

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