



REVIEW OF COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IRELAND AND ITS ACCREDITED SCHEMES

MAY 2023

WHAT IS CRJI AND ITS ACCREDITED SCHEMES AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

- ▶ Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) is an organisation offering community-based restorative justice services including mediation, youth mentoring and intervention services to the community in six locations across Belfast. Another two schemes aligned with CRJI operate in Derry/Londonderry and Newry/Armagh areas.
- ▶ The Schemes were accredited in line with a Northern Ireland Office *Protocol for Community Based Restorative Justice (CBRJ) Schemes* published in 2007 (the 2007 Protocol), which aimed to establish a framework for more formal relationships between the accredited CBRJ organisations and the criminal justice system. It envisaged formal referrals to CRJI from the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and the Police. When justice was devolved in 2010, the Department of Justice (DoJ) took over responsibility for the 2007 Protocol. Accreditation was paused in 2016.
- ▶ In 2022 the then Minister of Justice (MoJ) announced a review of the 2007 Protocol by an independent panel. The panel's report and a new draft Protocol was published in February 2023.

WHY DID CJI REVIEW CRJI AND ITS ACCREDITED SCHEMES?

- ▶ In October 2022, the MoJ requested CJI carry out a Review under the 2007 Protocol following concerns about the management and operation of CRJI including financial irregularities and staffing issues that led to negative publicity and comment on social media that damaged public perceptions and confidence. This was important to address as the DoJ were responsible for the Protocol and other Departments and organisations who gave CRJI public money took assurance from their accreditation.

WHAT DID YOU LOOK AT?

- ▶ We looked at the Schemes governance arrangements and compliance with the 2007 Protocol. We spoke to DoJ senior officials about their oversight of CRJI and the policy and procedures around monitoring public funds and what is achieved with them.
- ▶ We assessed the quality of CRJI practice and examined work that had been undertaken in partnership with criminal justice agencies.
- ▶ We visited the six CRJI offices in Belfast, CRJ Ltd., in Derry and CRJ Newry/Armagh. and spoke to staff, Board members, Management Committee members and examined records and case files.
- ▶ We also heard from staff and managers working in criminal justice organisations including Probation Officers, Police Officers and Prosecutors about their engagement with CRJI and its accredited Schemes.

WHAT DID YOU FIND?

Inspectors found that:

- ▶ The Schemes had been mostly compliant with the 2007 Protocol but they had not undertaken the restorative work the Protocol envisaged. Only four referrals in 13 years had come from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Police Service) and the PPS.
- ▶ Despite this, the Schemes provided community services that were not provided by any other group or organisation. Instead the Schemes focused on community work with a restorative ethos, covering issues such as bonfires, suicide awareness, threats and expulsions, neighbour disputes, antisocial behaviour, handing in of controlled drugs, and education programmes.

- ▶ Before this Review began, CRJI had identified that it did not have effective governance arrangements in place in key risk areas like financial management and human resources. Some steps had already been taken to address failings and improve policy and guidance but further work was needed.
- ▶ The working relationship between CRJI and the DoJ was not effective. There were also issues around communication, information sharing and reporting between CRJI and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI).
- ▶ The Police Service spoke positively about their working relationship with the Schemes and their contribution to the criminal justice system.
- ▶ Significant progress had been made against previous CJI recommendations but more work was needed.

WHAT NEEDS TO IMPROVE?

Inspectors made two strategic recommendations and six operational recommendations for improvement including:

At strategic level (leadership level):

- ▶ a risk assessment was needed to determine the appropriate level of oversight required from the DoJ over CRJI including the frequency of monitoring meetings and the reporting structure; and
- ▶ a formal document was required, to set out the nature of the relationship between CRJI and the Police Service and their respective remits when working in partnership and induction training for police officers new to community policing roles should be developed

At an operational level (on-the-ground level):

- ▶ community-based restorative justice should be recorded by the Police Service on criminal records as a diversionary disposal;
- ▶ a competitive tender process to appoint an external auditor for CRJI should be commenced;
- ▶ an anti-fraud policy should be developed and implemented with training provided to staff and volunteers;
- ▶ appropriate contact points in CRJI and the PBNI should be identified and regular meetings scheduled to improve understanding of each other's expectations and clearly define requirements;
- ▶ completion of the referral form by Police Officers when referring cases to community-based restorative justice schemes; and
- ▶ the development of a system by the Police Service to record referrals from community-based restorative justice schemes.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO SEE HAPPENING NOW?

The CRJI and its Schemes, the DoJ and criminal justice organisations working together to implement the Review recommendations. The DoJ need to progress its implementation of the new draft Protocol and CJI needs to clarify our future role within it.

