



# NO EXCUSE:

## A THEMATIC INSPECTION OF THE HANDLING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE CASES BY THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW OF THE INSPECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

APRIL 2021

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

Follow-up Reviews are carried out by Inspectors to assess if and how accepted inspection recommendations have been implemented by organisations. They are usually carried out around two years after an inspection report has been published.

- ▶ Provides a published assessment by CJI of the level of progress in implementing agreed recommendations arising from an inspection.
- ▶ Creates a clear expectation that CJI will return to assess momentum in implementing agreed recommendations and completing action plans.
- ▶ Allows inspected organisations to demonstrate the improvements they have made.

### HOW MUCH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IS HAPPENING IN NI?

- ▶ 31,817 domestic abuse incidents, including 18,640 domestic abuse crimes, were recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2019-20, the highest levels since data was first recorded in 2004-05.
- ▶ In 2019-20 PSNI statistics showed 69% of all domestic abuse crime victims were female and 30% were male, compared with 75% female and 25% male in 2004-05.
- ▶ Almost three in five relationships between the domestic abuse victim and offender were categorised as current or ex-spouse/partner/girlfriend/boyfriend. Just under a quarter were parent and child relationships.
- ▶ During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown between 23 March and mid-August 2020 domestic abuse calls were mainly above the weekly average. After then calls had tended to be below this weekly average apart from during the Christmas and New Year period 2020-21.

### WHAT WERE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2019 ORIGINAL INSPECTION?

#### CJI's 'No Excuse' report found:

- ▶ the PSNI needed to reconsider their approach to the training and development of new recruits and first responders in the areas of harassment, stalking and coercive and controlling behaviour and risk assessment practices in cases of domestic violence and abuse;
- ▶ the PSNI and its partners needed to further develop the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- ▶ the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland (PPS) should work together better as a 'prosecution team' on cases of domestic violence and abuse; and
- ▶ the Criminal Justice Board, together with its partners, should develop 'domestic abuse courts' across Northern Ireland and a properly costed contract for an Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service to support victims at high risk of harm.

**CJI made four strategic and three operational recommendations for improvement.**

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## WHO DID WE MEET AND WHAT PROGRESS DID WE FIND?

- ▶ This Follow-up Review focused on the work the PSNI, the PPS and the Department of Justice (DoJ) had undertaken to implement the inspection recommendations.
- ▶ Inspectors gathered data from the PSNI, the PPS and DoJ and met with them and key stakeholders to inform our views.
- ▶ We found evidence of improvement at a strategic and operational level.
- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and public health restrictions had led to more people looking for help about domestic abuse. The proactive partnership approach from a range of organisations across public, voluntary and community sectors through the Domestic Abuse Independent Advisory Group, co-ordinated by the PSNI, was a positive development.
- ▶ A notable achievement is the passage of the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill through the Northern Ireland Assembly and and the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act) created in under a year.
- ▶ The PSNI and its partners were developing a training package for introduction before the implementation of the new Act.
- ▶ Processes for the investigation and prosecution of domestic offences had been changed to increase the quality of work. Plans were being developed for specialist domestic abuse Prosecutors to deal with these types of cases.
- ▶ The DoJ had consulted on a Protection from Stalking Bill and asked for views about the need for Stalking Protection Orders.
- ▶ One recommendation was assessed as achieved; four were partially achieved and two not achieved.

## WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

- ▶ Inspectors were encouraged by how much the PSNI and PPS had done to improve their structures and working processes and to implement the inspection recommendations.
- ▶ Further action is required to deliver improvements to the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for high risk victims, building on the work undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Plans for domestic abuse courts and the delivery of the proposed advocacy service need to be finalised as soon as possible.
- ▶ The PSNI and the PPS need to maintain an ongoing focus on the issues raised in the original *No Excuse* inspection report.
- ▶ The ultimate assessment of this work will be in whether it delivers improved outcomes for victims and witnesses.
- ▶ This is an inspection topic that CJI will return to in future.

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



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