

## Response to PSNI Crime Prevention Strategy

### **Introduction**

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland welcome the opportunity to respond to the PSNI's Crime Prevention Strategy. In particular, we agree that the police, probation and other justice organisations must maximise efforts to work in partnership and collaboration. We welcome the commitment to early intervention, evidence based prevention approaches to protect the most vulnerable in society.

### **Background to PBNI**

The aim of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland is 'changing lives for safer communities. Probation is involved at all stages of the criminal justice process. It works in Courts providing pre-sentence reports to assist Judges to make decisions. It works in communities supervising sentences that must be served in the community. It works in prisons, preparing prisoners for release subject to licences. It also works directly with victims of crime through the Victim Information Scheme.

All probation officers are social work qualified staff, professionally trained in the assessment and management of risk and registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. They are enabled and supported by psychology staff, probation services officers and corporate staff across specialist functions in HR, finance, IT and communications.

In recent years our organisation has undergone a period of modernisation, including developing our IT, estates and workforce to ensure our staff are enabled to deliver front line services effectively and efficiently in local communities.

We continually review new research, evidence and feedback from sentencers, service users and practitioners in order to ensure we are providing the best possible service.

**The PSNI is a key partner for PBNI and we would wish to build on that partnership and further develop links strategically and operationally.**

### **Crime Trends**

As crime trends change and the nature of offending changes so too has our practice. There have been increases in reported incidents of domestic abuse, sexual crime and hate crime. This coupled with an increase in the vulnerability of individuals we are dealing with mean our practice has developed and evolved.

## **PBNI Caseload**

The top four offences recorded by persons on PBNI Caseload in March 2019 were Violence Against the Person, Drugs Offences, Theft and Sexual Offences.

Of the PBNI caseload at 31st March 2019 (4,552), more than three quarters of orders being supervised (3,551, 78%) were allocated to PBNI teams in the community, with the remainder in custody (1,001, 22%).

In terms of the main types of community order under supervision; the number of people on Probation Orders under supervision has increased by 10% from 1,288 at 31st March 2018 to 1,415 at 31st March 2019.

At 89%, males account for the vast majority of those on the PBNI caseload at 31st March 2019, with females accounting for 11%. However, the number of females on the caseload continues to increase and currently numbers 452, up 11% compared to the previous year.

PBNI assessed those people who started an order in 2017/18 and found that more than half of new starts were deemed to have an offending related problem in the following areas:

- Alcohol or Drugs (76%)
- Emotional wellbeing (63%)
- Family and Personal relationships (59%)
- Employment, Education and Training (51%)

**Taking account of the large numbers of people who have an offending problem in relation to drugs, alcohol and emotional wellbeing PBNI welcome the focus on alcohol and drug crime which includes prevention and treatment. PBNI play a key role in the Substance Misuse Court which is currently being piloted in Belfast.**

**We further welcome the acknowledgement of the impact that adverse childhood experiences have on people who have offended. PBNI has recently established a trauma informed justice group and PSNI are a part of that group alongside Youth Justice Agency and the NI Prison Service. We look forward to continuing to work with PSNI on this issue.**

**Given that the proportion of violent and sexual offences has increased we think it would be useful to reference sexual offending and Child Sexual Exploitation and methods employed to prevent/reduce sexual offending.**

## **Section 2 – Drivers of Crime**

The strategy states that:

*Evidence suggests the Criminal Justice System – the PSNI, the courts, prisons and probation services – can prevent crime through four principal mechanisms:*

**Deterrence** – *The theory that people refrain from committing criminal acts as a result of the fear of sanctions or punishment, and so any Criminal Justice System action which increases the costs, or reduces the benefits, of crime should act as a deterrent. One way of increasing the costs is by increasing the perceived likelihood of being caught and punished;*

**Legitimacy** – *Theories of procedural justice suggest that by engaging positively with people and treating them fairly, those working in the Criminal Justice System can increase the system's legitimacy in the eyes of the public and foster greater compliance with the law;*

**Custodial Sentences** – *Studies have shown that preventing offenders from committing further offences by imprisoning them can reduce crime overall, particularly if the most prolific offenders are targeted and placed in custody in this way;*

**Rehabilitation** – *There is evidence that some rehabilitation programmes delivered through the Criminal Justice System can be effective in reducing crime and reoffending, particularly where they aim to address the causes of offending – such as treatment for drug addiction or anger-management.*

*Whilst there continues to be a wide-ranging program of justice reforms ongoing, this strategy focuses specifically on measures that will make the Criminal Justice System a more effective deterrent to would-be offenders.*

**Under 'deterrence' we think that the use of civil orders such as SOPOs, VOPOs, RSHOs (risk of sexual harm orders) and CAWNs (child abduction warning notices) could be referenced.**

**Under 'rehabilitation' PBNI would wish to highlight the effectiveness of a range of probation programmes in preventing reoffending and rehabilitating people who have offended. PBNI have a number of accredited interventions which are targeted to particular causal factors of offending behaviour e.g anger management, positive relationships, alcohol misuse. Core PBNI programmes such as Building Better Relationships (BBR), Horizon and Thinking Skills are effective in challenging behaviour. Each programme teaches new methods of self-management based on current research & evaluation which adhere to both national and international best practice.**

We also have the Aspire Project which works with young men aged 18-30 at risk of criminality has also been evaluated with positive outcomes and referred to as an exemplar in diversionary work. Under this section we also think there should be mention of the use of CoSA (circles of support) to tackle sex offending.

PBNI would also wish to point out that while custodial sentences are highlighted in this document, community sentences ie sentences imposed by a judge but served in the community also have a role in preventing reoffending. For example, the reoffending data shows that three out of four people who complete community service do not re-offend within one year.

The Enhanced Combination Order which is an alternative to short prison sentences of less than 12 months is being piloted across three court districts in NI has been independently evaluated on three occasions. Research shows that outcomes for short prison sentences are not positive. The outcomes however for ECO's are extremely positive in assisting rehabilitation.

## **Section 2 – People**

Under the heading 'offender' the strategy states:

*We will work with partners and specialist agencies to achieve the core goal of diverting an individual from committing a crime (motivated offender). We recognise that this may not always be possible therefore we will target our activity to prevent those who have offended from offending again.*

*To achieve this we will:*

- *Focus our activity on the criminal/individual, not just the crime or vulnerability*
- *Use the most appropriate interventions (e.g. targeted operations, Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP), restorative justice, and the courts)*
- *Ensure effective scoring is used to allow all staff to assist in tackling high risk offenders (e.g. Organised Crime Gangs) and protecting their potential victims*
- *Ensure multi – agency approach to target high risk individuals/OCGs including asset recovery interventions*

**PBNI have worked in partnership with the PSNI through Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) and the Public Protection Arrangements NI. It is important that multi-agency work continues. There is much to be gained from information sharing to prevent prolific offenders and those who are high risk of reoffending.**

**In terms of multi –agency work we would like to see reference to the Public Protection Arrangements NI. Those arrangements continue to be key to managing high risk sexual and violent offenders and have been highlighted by CJINI as an important example of multi-agency working.**

## **Conclusion**

**PBNI support the aim of this strategy and welcome the approach taken. We are keen to enhance our partnership work with the police service and continue to work together through PCSPs, MARACs, PPANI and ROP. We would like to enhance our partnership work in some areas. For example, we think that there is more joint awareness raising work that we could do in relation to domestic abuse.**