**Probation Board for Northern Ireland Consultation on Corporate Plan 2023-26**

**Foreword from Board Chair**

I am delighted to present the Probation Board for Northern Ireland’s (PBNI) Draft Corporate Plan 2023-26 for public consultation. The current Board was appointed in March 2022; it is therefore timely that we set the strategic framework for the organisation to deliver services. The consultation will be open for 10 weeks and during that time we hope to hear from partners, interested parties and staff about whether the four strategic priorities adequately reflect the future direction of the organisation.

The challenges faced over the last Corporate Planning period have been unprecedented. The pandemic and the subsequent restrictions impacted across our entire society. Probation worked hard to ensure that essential services continued to be delivered and its Recovery Plan prioritised those who posed most risk to the public and the most vulnerable people on the caseload. The pace of recovery from the pandemic and clearing back logs within the system, is highly likely to increase demand for probation services and how this is being planned for, managed and resourced is an important element of the next Corporate Planning period. Likewise, the response to the pandemic also identified innovative and new ways of working and delivering services and these will be embedded within future planning.

Like all public services probation is also likely to face challenging financial settlements over the coming three-year period. Any pressures on budget are likely to impact upon our service delivery. It is imperative we find ways to mitigate the impact of financial constraints on our front-line delivery over the next three years to maintain our practice standards, which is how we protect the public. At the same time, we are working with people whose needs are becoming increasingly complex. Staff are working with more people who are suffering from poor mental health and addictions. Many have experienced multiple childhood adversities and suffer from intergenerational trauma. Our operational staff have been trained in delivering trauma-informed practice and delivering this holistic approach on an individual basis takes significant time and effort.

There are some significant workforce issues which will continue to be relevant over the coming Corporate Planning period. This includes the need for the organisation to have modern, fit for purpose pay structures in place to enable us to attract suitable candidates and, more importantly, retain experienced social work staff. Current difficulties in retaining experienced social work staff, many of whom are responsible for managing our highest risk casework, are adversely impacting upon staff workloads and the delivery of services. If an appropriate pay system is not in place very early in the Corporate Planning period, the loss of experienced staff will continue and probably deteriorate further. This outcome, with all the unwelcome consequences for service delivery, must be avoided.

This Plan also sets out our desire to continue to be an organisation which is innovative, creative, collaborative and solution focused. Working alongside our partners we want to implement learning from the last three years and improve our services to provide a high quality, professional service to all.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to our staff who have demonstrated immense dedication and commitment over the last number of years. Every day staff throughout PBNI support, hold to account and assist the people we work with to improve their outcomes, change their lives for safer communities resulting in fewer victims of crime.

**Max Murray CBE**

**Introduction**

This Draft Corporate Plan covering the period 2023-26 sets out the organisation’s strategic intent and vision for the next three years.

This consultation takes place during a period of political, economic and operational uncertainty. In the absence of an Executive, a Budget for 2022-23 cannot be agreed, therefore the Department of Justice has provided PBNI with a contingency planning envelope to allow the continuation of service delivery.  The lack of a multi-year budget and uncertainty around our financial resources makes planning, particularly longer-term planning extremely difficult.

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly took place on 5 May 2022.  However, a new Executive has yet to be formed.  As such, existing Ministers remain in post from the last mandate in line with the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Act 2022.   In January 2022, the Executive published a consultation on a new Programme for Government.  Progress on finalising this piece of work has been limited due to the political impasse.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted upon the delivery of all public services and PBNI is no different. There has been learning from the pandemic and as a result, there will be new ways of working and delivering services in the future.

While the uncertainties pose particular challenges for PBNI in this corporate planning period, there is also an opportunity for us to implement learning and continue to be innovative in developing our practice.

In developing our strategic priorities, we have also considered how PBNI aligns with the Department of Justice’s priorities and in particular, how we support the work of our partners including the prison service, the police service and the courts service with the overall objective of having fewer victims of crime.

 In this plan therefore we are setting out four clear strategic priorities around these themes:

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| **Our People** – we will develop, support, and empower our staff to improve service delivery. **Our Services** – we will deliver an effective, quality statutory probation service to reduce reoffending.**Our Funding** – we will prioritise our budget to maximise service delivery.**Our Partnerships** – we will develop our partnerships to help make communities safer.  |

We are committing through this strategy of providing an outcome focussed approach to our work with an emphasis on quality assurance. An annual Business Plan with objectives will flow from this Corporate Plan. We will use all available data from evaluations of projects and local and international research on probation practice to help inform our objectives and measure how we are making a difference to people by changing lives for safer communities.

**How Probation Changes lives for Safer Communities**

The role of probation is to reduce reoffending and help make communities safer. We do this by assessing and managing risk and tackling the root causes of offending behaviour and provide a problem-solving approach. We also have a role in prevention and intervening as early as possible to prevent people continuing in the cycle of offending behaviour. We support and hold people to account to help them change their lives and become rehabilitated and reintegrated into local communities. There are a number of touch points where probation works alongside partners to deliver services.

* We provide pre-sentence reports to assist the Judiciary to make decisions.
* We supervise sentences imposed by the Judiciary that must be served in the community and we supervise licences imposed when someone leaves prison.
* We work in prisons, preparing prisoners for release subject to licences.
* We work with victims of crime through the Victim Information Scheme.

Our probation officers are social workers who are qualified and trained in risk assessment and management which are essential skills in this complex and challenging work. We also have staff who are psychologists, community service officers, probation services officers, and administrative staff in operational teams. We also employ finance, communications, human resources and IT staff to support front line staff and carry out our statutory duties. Every member of staff contributes to changing lives for safer communities.

**Our Aim, Vision and Values**

Our Aim

PBNI’s aim is: *‘changing lives for safer communities’.*

Our Vision

We will reduce reoffending by tackling the root causes of offending behaviour and rehabilitating people and reintegrating them into communities. We will be collaborative and transformative to reduce the number of victims of crime and build safer communities.

Our Values and Guiding Principles

Our organisational values are key to our way of working and outline how members of the public, service users and staff can expect to be treated when engaging with PBNI. Our values are supported by guiding principles. Our values act as the foundation for our principles. Board members and staff also adhere to the ‘Nolan principles of public life’ which are the basis of the ethical standards Board members and those employed in probation are expected to adhere to.

Values

**Respect** - We will treat everyone with respect and dignity at all times and value diversity and differing viewpoints.

**Integrity** - We will act in a way that engenders trust with all. We will be honest in what we say and do.

**Openness** - We will encourage people to speak up and make suggestions about practice and we will be open about our decision making.

**Accountability** - We will be accountable for our decisions and actions.

**Guiding Principles**

Recognising and encouraging people’s capacity to change - We believe all people, given the right circumstances have the ability to change their lives.

Partnership and Collaborative Working - We value partnership and collaboration across statutory, community and voluntary sectors and where appropriate the private sector.

Empowering and Innovating – We are committed to empowering our staff to look for solutions and be innovative in developing policy and practice.

Equality and Diversity - We recognise, understand and respond to peoples unique needs.

Professionalism of Staff - We will carry out our role professionally adhering to professional standards and do our jobs effectively.

Using Resources Effectively – We will use our limited resources effectively and decisions on budget reductions will be tested against the need to maintain our practice standards, to mitigate the impact on our service users and the risk to public safety.

**Strategic Priorities Explained**

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| **Strategic Priority 1** **Our People – We will develop, support and empower our staff to improve service delivery.** |

We will develop, support and empower our staff to provide effective, quality supervision in line with practice standards and improve service delivery. Over the coming three-year period we will: continue our work on pay modernisation; agree a workload measurement tool; introduce a hybrid working model; and focus on staff wellbeing, professional development and career progression. We will continue to develop our culture and enhance staff engagement. In the coming months PBNI staff will, for the first time, take part in an independent ‘People Survey’ conducted by NISRA. This will enable us to benchmark employee engagement and in response to the survey findings develop our People Strategy. We want to have a skilled, competent and confident workforce in place able to deliver safe, high quality service delivery.

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| **Strategic Priority 2** **Our Services – We will deliver an effective statutory probation service to reduce reoffending.** |

PBNI has a clearly defined statutory role to deliver services to people who have offended and victims who are registered with our Victim Information scheme to help make communities safer. Currently probation staff are working with over 4,000 individuals and the complexity of cases we are dealing with has significantly increased with individuals presenting with addictions, mental health issues, with many at risk of suicide and self-harm. This has resulted in staff spending more time on an individual basis with service users in order to support them and assist them to access support services. The numbers of victims registered with the Victim Information Scheme has increased over the last Corporate Plan period and we have significantly developed our restorative approach. This is an area we will continue to develop. A critical element of our role is working with those who have committed sexual and violent crime, including domestic abuse and this will continue to be a priority. In delivering services we will implement learning from how we delivered services during the pandemic and seek to be innovative in delivering services effectively. We will also implement learning from internal and external audits and inspections of our practice.

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| **Strategic Priority 3** **Our Funding – We will prioritise our budget to maximise service delivery.** |

There will be significant pressures on PBNI’s budget over the coming three-year period. Reductions in our budget will impact upon our work in reducing reoffending and will lead to increased pressures on our staff, on other parts of the justice system, and wider public services. A key priority for PBNI is prioritising our limited resources to maximise service delivery. Decisions on budget reductions will therefore be tested against agreed principles. These are to maintain our practice standards, to mitigate the impact on our service users and the risk to public safety. We will continue to work closely with the Department to ensure that we maximise efficiencies through the introduction of new IT systems, our Estates and workforce modernisation and do our best to mitigate risks to service delivery.

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| **Strategic Priority 4** **Our Partnerships – We will develop our partnerships to help make communities safer.** |

PBNI’s strength lies in its ability to work in partnership with a range of organisations including statutory partners such as the prison service, police service and courts as well as the large network of voluntary and community groups across Northern Ireland. If we are to be effective in preventing people from reoffending we need to intervene at the earliest opportunity and that means working alongside a range of partners including within health, education, employment/training and housing. If we are not in a position to intervene at the earliest opportunity we will simply push the problem further downstream at a greater cost. Over the period of this Corporate Plan we will also prioritise our engagement with local government particularly through Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and initiatives such as Complex Lives.

**Annual Business Plan**

The annual Business Plan is the delivery mechanism for the strategic priorities. It is published separately to the Corporate Plan giving details, measurable actions and outcomes. The plan allows judgements to be made on progress towards the intent set out in the Corporate Plan. The measurable actions and outcomes will be based on the principle of delivering positive, measurable outcomes. The Probation Board monitors the progress of the Business Plan quarterly. In addition, information on the delivery of the Business Plan is reported in the Probation Board’s Annual Report.

**Planning Assumptions**

Our Corporate Plan has been informed by the following assumptions:

* **Budget:** As public services respond to a cost-of-living crisis, increased inflation, a rise in energy costs and the impact of the pandemic, budgets across all Government Departments will be under extreme pressure. We therefore anticipate that our allocated budget will be insufficient to meet the demand for our services and our administrative costs over the period of this Plan. This will significantly impact upon probation and how it delivers services.
* **Workload**: Currently there are over 4000 individuals on PBNI’s caseload. There has been an increase in the complexity of cases PBNI deals with and an increase in the vulnerability of service users, for example there are more people presenting with addictions and poor mental health. These individuals tend to be more complex with more time spent by staff accessing support services for individuals. There has also been an increase in the number of women on the caseload and an increase in the number of victims registered with our Victim Information Scheme. We anticipate that that this increase in the complexity of cases is likely to continue over the next three years. We will prepare to meet this challenge as best we can within our limited resources.
* **Workforce**: PBNI is having significant difficulties in retaining social work staff. We have lost a number of experienced staff due mainly to the pay differential between social workers within probation compared to other sectors. This is having an adverse impact on staff workloads, how we deliver probation practice and critically the loss of experienced staff who are responsible for managing our most complex and highest risk casework. We anticipate that this situation will continue as we move into the initial period covered by this Plan and will take steps over the short to medium term to stabilise our workforce while aiming to secure a sustainable workforce over the longer term.
* **Innovation:** PBNI is committed to continuing to innovate and implement best practice learning from local and international research on probation practice. Over the coming three-year period we will review and implement learning from the pandemic to ensure our structures and systems support our staff and enables us to work most effectively.

**7. About this Consultation**

PBNI is consulting on its Corporate Plan. We want to hear your views. This consultation seeks views on PBNI’s priorities for the Corporate Plan 2023-26. We invite comments on this Plan from members of the public, key stakeholders as well as organisations and individuals who have an interest in this area. Responses or requests for further information should be provided by 10 November 2022 (please note that it may not be possible to accept consultation responses after this date). You can respond to the consultation exercise by email or post.

Please respond by email to info@probation-ni.gov.uk or by post to Gail McGreevy, Head of Communications 80-90 North Street Belfast BT1 1LD

**QUESTION 1: Do you agree with our four strategic priorities?**

**QUESTION 2: Is there anything missing from the strategic priorities?**

**Question 3: Is there anything further you wish to add?**

**Key Achievements 2020-23**

**How much we did**

* We supervised 8449 people subject to a community sentence or licence.  Through the supervision process staff support and hold people to account in order to prevent reoffending.
* We supported and provided information to 496 victims and survivors who have registered with the PBNI victim information scheme.
* We provided 11272 reports to assist Judges make sentencing decisions.
* We developed a restorative practice framework.
* We established a Performance, Practice and Research unit to improve probation practice.
* We provided funding to over 100 community and voluntary organisations to assist probation deliver their core task of reducing offending.
* We contributed to a range of partnerships including the Public Protection Arrangements NI, PCSPs, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences, and Domestic Homicide Reviews.
* We provided staff to all three prisons in NI to assist in the resettlement of those leaving custody and returning to the community.
* We launched our first service user newsletter enabling those who are on probation to have a voice and help us improve service delivery.
* We developed and implemented a Business Continuity Plan and Recovery Plan to ensure that service delivery continued in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.
* We Delivered a new Electronic Case Management System to support and assist probation staff.
* We delivered a new IT infrastructure project and ensured all relevant operational and corporate staff have laptops, mobile phones and wifi enabled office space.
* We commenced a cultural transformation programme.
* We established a team briefing system and virtual town hall events to enhance internal communications and engagement.
* We developed and delivered our first leadership development programme for new middle managers.
* We continued our partnership work across these islands and within Europe to share best practice and keep people safer.

**How well we did it**

* We delivered our services within available budget.
* We delivered on all of our business plan objectives.
* The level of successfully completed orders/licences was 82%.

**Is anyone better off?**

*“I never gave up because you made me believe in myself. A lot of people look at you funny and treat you different when you have a record. But you never did. So you should be proud of yourself because you are changing peoples lives with how you treat them” (service user)*

*“I wanted to get in touch and say thanks again and to let you know what’s happened with me since I finished Probation. Over the last loads of months I have just stuck my head down and worked as hard as I could. I got an award in work and being put through training because they say I have everything to be a team leader and should be one within a few months. I got myself a new car and also got engaged. If it wasn’t for you I really wouldn’t be where I am not and it’s the happiest I’ve been.” (service user)*

*“This helped me more than I could have ever imagined. You all treated me like a person, you make it a lot of easier. Glad it was the length it was as if it was shorter it may have gone a different way, longer got me where I needed to be especially with my partner and now baby, that wouldn’t have been that way if I hadn’t have changed.” (service user)*