



KEY FACTS

VULNERABLE OLDER PEOPLE

An inspection of the criminal justice system's approach to vulnerable older people in Northern Ireland.

SEPTEMBER 2023



WHAT WAS THIS INSPECTION ABOUT?

- This inspection looked at the way organisations in the criminal justice system supported older vulnerable people who had a fear of crime or were victims of crime. The inspection focused on people over 60 years of age who were vulnerable because of their physical health, mental health, thinking and reasoning abilities or their life circumstances.
- Inspectors examined the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Police Service), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (the PPS), the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (the NICTS) and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (the PBNI).



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Tribunals Service**
www.justice-ni.gov.uk/courts-and-tribunals



PBNI Probation Board
for Northern Ireland

HOW DID YOU CARRY OUT THIS INSPECTION?

- Inspectors examined and assessed what the criminal justice organisations did throughout the victim's journey. We considered legislation, strategy and crime prevention, first response and investigation, decisions to prosecute and what happened when a case was at Court as well as the support provided both during and after the case had concluded.
- We spoke with staff working in with organisations that provide advice and support to older people, as well as Police Officers, Prosecutors, Probation Officers and Court staff. We looked at some cases which had been responded to and investigated by Police Officers and then sent to Prosecutors for a decision and a prosecution at Court.



WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- The Police Service had a focus on older victims of crimes, particularly when they had experienced crimes before and were a repeat victim. Other organisations did not have the same focus on older people in their policies.
- The Police Service did a lot of work in the area of crime prevention, particularly where older people were the potential victims. We found some excellent examples of crime prevention initiatives aimed at older people. The Multi-Agency Support Hubs also focused on vulnerable victims, including older people.
- There is an opportunity to improve assessments by Police Officers about the needs of older vulnerable people, particularly where they were experiencing an impairment such as dementia, which may prevent them from giving evidence at a later time during the case.
- Older people faced several barriers to reporting crime and giving evidence to support a prosecution and had particular needs which require recognition. This included their family situation, physical mobility issues, conditions that may affect thinking and reasoning abilities, such as dementia, or life circumstances such as isolation or housing issues.



WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors have made five recommendations for improvement including:

At a strategic (leadership) level:

- The Police Service needs to work with colleagues in the PPS to develop and implement an action plan to improve the ability of vulnerable older victims of crime to give their best evidence (for example, using video-recorded statements) and enable their cases to move through the criminal justice system faster, speeding them up where appropriate.

At an operational (on the ground) level:

- The Police Service should review its Older People and Crime Strategy once work at a national level is completed.
- The Police Service should develop a communications plan to raise awareness of the *QuickCheck* and *Banking Protocol* fraud prevention schemes.
- The PPS should continue to work with the Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland (COPNI) to better reflect the needs of older people in its policies, particularly the Victim and Witness Policy, and internal guidance for Prosecutors. This should include defining what is meant by an older person.
- The PPS should include age as a criteria in its processes for ensuring cases involving domestic abuse or a domestically motivated crime are dealt with to an acceptable standard. Any areas for improvement should be identified and actioned.





WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN NOW?

The Police Service and the PPS should work on these recommendations, particularly where they need to work together, to improve how vulnerable older people are treated and supported to give their evidence. The effective progression and disposal of all cases is important, but even more so when a victim and witness's cognitive ability is in decline and their access to justice is impacted by this.



If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

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