



# WITHOUT WITNESS:

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

MARCH 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.

### WHAT IS THE SCALE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN NI?

- ▶ 3,558 sexual offences were recorded by the police in 2019-20, a slight increase of 22 offences compared to 2018-19. This was the highest number of offences recorded since 1998-99, three times higher than the lowest level recorded in 2000-01.
- ▶ During 11 weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown from 23 March 2020 to 7 June 2020, all recorded sexual offences fell by just over one third, reported rapes fell by 39% and other sexual offences fell by 32%, compared with the same time period in 2019.

### WHAT WERE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2018 ORIGINAL INSPECTION?

#### CJI's 'Without Witness' report found:

- ▶ a need for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) to work together better as a 'prosecution team' on cases of sexual violence and abuse;
- ▶ a need for the PPS to give greater priority to sexual offences and offences committed in a domestic context in their organisational targets;
- ▶ a need for changes to the law about what directions Judges give to juries in sexual offences trials and the inclusion of serious sexual offences in reforming the committal process and how cases pass from the Magistrates' Court to the Crown Court;
- ▶ the PSNI needed to review how it resourced public protection work to better manage demand and victim confidence;
- ▶ improved use of digital technology was needed across the criminal justice system; and
- ▶ better record keeping, communication with victims and witnesses and the use of Counsel in sexual offences cases by the PPS.

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

## WITHOUT WITNESS:

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

MARCH 2021

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

- ▶ This Follow-Up Review focused on the work of the PSNI, PPS and the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the work they had undertaken to implement the inspection recommendations.
- ▶ Inspectors met with the organisations, key stakeholders and gathered data from the PSNI, PPS and DoJ to inform our views.
- ▶ Two recommendations were assessed as achieved; four were partially achieved and three not achieved.
- ▶ We found evidence of improvement at a strategic and operational level.
- ▶ Changes have been made to the organisational structures of both the PSNI and the PPS.
- ▶ Quality standards for the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences have been implemented.
- ▶ Enabling technology for quicker and more efficient digital evidence sharing between the PSNI and PPS has been progressed.
- ▶ Legislation had been introduced in the NI Assembly to reform the committal process but not yet developed to introduce jury directions for sexual offences trials.

## WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

- ▶ Inspectors were encouraged by how much the PSNI and PPS have done to improve their structures and working processes and implement the inspection recommendations.
- ▶ Further work is required on the PPS's recording on case files, communication with victims and the use of Counsel in sexual offences cases.
- ▶ The PSNI and the PPS need to maintain an ongoing focus on the issues raised in the original *Without Witness* 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*



**Criminal Justice Inspection  
Northern Ireland**  
Block 1, Knockview Buildings  
Belfast BT4 3SJ  
[www.cjini.org](http://www.cjini.org)