

Conference Spec

OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Welcome from the Chief Inspector



Dr Michael Maguire

I am delighted to welcome you to this special edition of *The Spec* dedicated to CJI's 2011 Stakeholder Conference.

The devolution of policing and justice has been the biggest change to the justice system here in a generation. David Ford MLA was the first local Minister of Justice to present to the CJI conference in the eight years the Inspectorate has been in existence. I am very grateful for his comments on the positive contribution made by Criminal Justice Inspection to the development of a better justice system.

The conference addressed a particular aspect of the changes under devolution, that of accountability. The increased political accountability of organisations has been underpinned by an even greater media interest in the work of justice agencies. The conference provided access to decision-makers from within the media and the Committee for Justice. I would like to thank all the panel members for their contributions to an interesting and stimulating day. In my view, it helped to clear away some of the myths of the 'goldfish bowl' of accountability.

The biggest message I took from the day was that of the importance of engagement. The development of an understanding of what each of the key stakeholders is trying to achieve is critical. Members of the Justice Committee spoke of their role in developing a better justice system for all.

They did not want to try and catch organisations 'out' but rather, develop a process of engagement that helped to make the justice system better for all citizens in Northern Ireland.

Many of the justice panel members mentioned that they were surprised by the diversity of work across the justice system, the number of agencies involved and they welcomed the support and efforts of those undertaking their daily activities. There is a common goal to make the system better.

From a media perspective, it was clear that different views existed in relation to how stories were covered and the level of scrutiny of justice agencies. Here again the importance of engagement was emphasised in order that the full messages are understood and brought into the public domain.

Accountability and scrutiny has always been with the justice system. Under devolution, it has become sharper in focus and more intense in activity. CJI will continue to play its part in encouraging debate and engagement. We are again pleased to host an event to bring participants together to reflect and comment on the issues we face.

Dr Michael Maguire
Chief Inspector of Criminal
Justice in Northern Ireland

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Collaborative working can provide clear benefits says Chief Inspector

Dr Michael Maguire addresses the 2011 Stakeholder Conference.



The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland Dr Michael Maguire chose to highlight the importance of a collective, joined-up approach to justice in his keynote speech at this year's Stakeholder Conference.

Dr Maguire began by drawing attention to the learning which could be gathered from CJI's inspection of the treatment and care of people with mental health issues within the criminal justice system.

"This report argued that mental health is not a marginal issue as it represents enormous challenges for all the justice organisations from police through to prisons," said Dr Maguire.

"The publication of the report concluded with a very useful cross departmental meeting between health and justice organisations, raised both in the context of the work that we did and in relation to the work undertaken by Lord Bradley in Great Britain.

"This in my view, was a good example of cross departmental working and the importance of justice linking with another devolved department to address what should be a common goal," he said.

"There is significant political interest in the work of the Inspectorate and we are ready and willing to play our role in providing independent, impartial and objective assessment to assist others in the decision making process"

Dr Michael Maguire

Addressing delay

Reflecting on the first report he had delivered to the locally elected Minister of Justice, Dr Maguire said the Inspectorate's report on avoidable delay had shown that despite major efforts being made, there was still relatively little change in the overall length of time taken from arrest through to disposal by a court.

"It remains too long, particularly where young people are involved," he said, adding that the conclusion of the Inspectorate was that a 'step change' was required in the performance of justice organisations if they were to meet the challenges of reducing avoidable delay.

"Justice organisations need to work more closely together in the delivery of a joined up justice system, particularly in developing a stronger working relationship between the police and the prosecution service," stated the Chief Inspector.

Dr Maguire added that accelerating the time it takes for a case to be dealt with could help reduce the trauma of the victim, especially when dealing with highly sensitive cases such as those of sexual or domestic violence or abuse.

Individual perspective

"As we examine the journey of an individual through the justice process, we see that from their perspective, it can be a fragmented and disjointed experience. Moving from one organisation to another can mean that victims feel dissatisfied with the services they have received and this does not help public confidence," continued Dr Maguire.

"To the victim of sexual abuse or domestic violence, the justice system is a connected process, and this often sits uncomfortably beside the reality of what actually happens," he said.

Dr Maguire indicated the difference in perspective between those on the receiving end of the justice



system and the justice organisations themselves, had been highlighted in the work CJI

undertook with regard to the Donagh sexual abuse cases.

"It is very clear from the perspective of the victim and the witness that the lines of demarcation between justice organisations may be somewhat fuzzy. As we saw with the Donagh cases, a perceived poor outcome in one area can reflect badly on all justice organisations.

"In the minds of people whether we like it or not, the criminal justice system is perceived as just that, a connected system that works together to deliver a common goal," added Dr Maguire.

Collaborative working

Looking back at the findings of CJI's reports, Dr Maguire stressed the clear message to emerge from the 23 separate pieces of work the Inspectorate had carried out over the last 12 months, was that collaborative working with strong leadership from the centre provided clear benefits.

As he drew his remarks to a conclusion, Dr Maguire reflected on the oversight and accountability theme of this year's conference.

"I think it is fair to say that the devolution of policing and justice has been the most significant change in the justice system for a generation. There is no doubt that a local Minister and Justice Committee make a difference to the way in which organisations operate, and the change in dynamic is clear from the perspective of CJI.

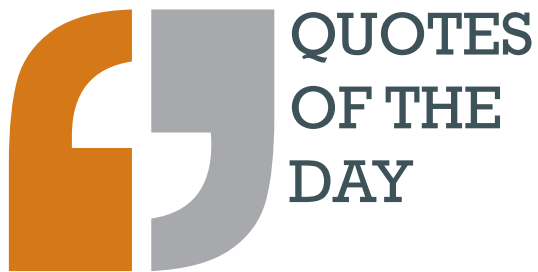
"There is significant political interest in the work of the Inspectorate and we are ready and willing to play our role in providing independent, impartial and objective assessment to assist others in the decision making process," stated the Chief Inspector.

"The role of the media is also critical in shaping perspectives and expectations of justice organisations and how they operate, especially as most people who have not had contact with the justice system get their opinions from what the media says about it," he concluded.



"I think it is fair to say that the devolution of policing and justice has been the most significant change in the justice system for a generation"

Dr Michael Maguire



“There are many relevant issues contained within the Justice Committee... and I think those are very important for ordinary people”

Alban Maginness MLA

“I welcome the work which has been done by CJINI in providing assurance to the public”

David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice

“We look on the criminal justice system favourably as it brings us news that is neatly packed”

Deric Henderson, PA

“I think the first thing that struck me was the number of agencies that are involved in the criminal justice system”

Raymond McCartney MLA

“In the minds of the people whether we like it or not, the criminal justice system is perceived as just that... a connected system that works together to deliver a common goal”

Dr Michael Maguire, Chief Inspector CJI

“Independent inspection and review is a vitally important plank in supporting the reform agenda”

David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice

“We need to learn that we don’t just look at the individual reports but we look to see how the emerging themes can ensure that the system works better together”

David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice

“This is a unique gathering as it represents not only the justice organisations, the voluntary and community sector but also the oversight and scrutiny bodies”

Dr Michael Maguire, Chief Inspector CJI

“We will report the positive if and when it comes”

Rob Morrison, UTV

“There needs to be a recognition that journalists have a job to do and will need to do that job as the various agencies have a job to do as well”

Noel Doran, Irish News

Minister's Speech

David Ford MLA focused on three specific themes when he addressed the 2011 CJI Stakeholder Conference as Northern Ireland's first locally elected Minister of Justice.

The Minister began by expressing his delight at being present at the event and welcoming the diverse range of people and organisations represented at the Conference.

He swiftly moved on to highlight the contribution Criminal Justice Inspection makes to the justice system in Northern Ireland.

"I consider the work of CJINI is a key resource for me as Minister of Justice, that's why I have regular discussions with the Chief Inspector. The reports which Michael and his team have provided to me really do help to judge which parts of the system are working well and delivering the type of justice system that I believe our community deserves," said Mr Ford.

"Their recommendations remind me of the challenges which lie ahead for all of us and the need to be addressed as I seek to lead the reshaping of the justice system," added the Minister.

Underpinning the role of the Inspectorate, Mr Ford stated that "independent inspection and review is a vitally important plank in supporting the reform agenda.

"The independent scrutiny role really does need to be valued. It needs to be protected and I know that the concept of independence is highly valued by the staff of the Inspectorate," said the Justice Minister.

During his remarks the Minister of Justice paid tribute to the ability of the Inspectorate to act as a 'critical friend' feeding into the work carried out by the Criminal Justice Board in developing its programmes.



"The reports which Michael and his team have provided to me really do help to judge which parts of the system are working well and delivering the type of justice system that I believe our community deserves"

David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice



David Ford MLA
outlines his vision
for the future.

Vision

The Minister was also keen to highlight his own vision for the criminal justice system.

"My overall aim is that the justice system shows that it is up for reform and up for working more effectively together. All of us in or related to the justice system have the potential to set proper boundaries, and for independent agencies to be secure in independence whilst still working together," he said.

"Victims and witnesses are not particularly concerned who delivers the service, but they want to be clear about what they can expect and then to have that standard delivered.

"Certainly as we look at tackling delay, it's absolutely clear that for victims and witnesses, the only time that matters is the time between a crime happening and final disposal in court.

"They are not concerned which agency is responsible for which part of the system," the Minister reflected.

Shaping views

Moving on to his final theme, the Justice Minister said he believed the devolution of policing and justice matters had brought a fresh spotlight onto the justice system.

"The media are an important part of the accountability arrangements especially where they highlight those criminal justice stories which, in their view, are in the public interest.

"That freedom of communication and expression is an important facet of a democratic society but the responsibility that it demands shouldn't be underestimated," said the Minister.

Mr Ford indicated that as most people in Northern Ireland would have no direct engagement with the criminal justice system, the views and understanding of the public was often shaped by what they saw on television, heard on the radio or read in the newspapers.

"That places an important responsibility on the media about the way in which criminal justice stories are reported," he said.

This responsibility he continued related to how crime was reported; how Criminal Justice Inspection reports were reported; and the responsibilities criminal justice agencies had towards the media.

The Minister indicated that the Committee for Justice also represented an important strand in the accountability architecture within the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Engagement

"I want to put on record my value of the engagement between my Department and the Justice Committee, and I look forward to continuing to receive their advice and assistance in the months ahead," said the locally elected Justice Minister.

Mr Ford said he wished to see a positive engagement between both himself and Departmental officials and the Justice Committee and he urged criminal justice agencies to do likewise.

"I think it is important that we use the opportunity for all the agencies involved to engage with the Committee so that we start to learn together how things have to be done to make the necessary reforms," he said.

As he concluded his remarks, the Minister of Justice highlighted the close nature of the relationship between oversight and accountability arrangements and the public confidence everyone needed to build within the justice system.

"I believe that the Inspectorate will have no shortage of material to work on as it evaluates the impact of these reforms.

"By doing so you Michael, Brendan and all the team within the Inspectorate will continue to provide us in the Department with a valuable service and will make a crucial contribution to building public confidence in Northern Ireland's justice system," he said.

The Media Panel

In a first for the CJI Stakeholder Conference delegates attending this year's event had the opportunity to hear directly from five of Northern Ireland's most senior journalists.

The media panel involved Noel Doran, editor of the Irish News; Vincent Kearney, Home Affairs Correspondent with BBC Northern Ireland; Rob Morrison, Head of News and Content for UTV plc; Darwin Templeton, editor of the News Letter; and Deric Henderson, Ireland editor for the Press Association.

Conference MC Liam Creagh outlined the professional background and experience of each of the five panel members before leading an informal debate among the panelists examining what makes a news story; the nature of the relationship between the media and criminal justice agencies and why bad news dominated over good.

Kicking off the debate, Deric Henderson explained that for his news organisation, the criminal justice system provided "probably the best news of all."

"We look on the whole justice system favourably because what it does is bring us news that is neatly packed," he said.

Deric highlighted the frustration he had with the justice system was the speed at which justice was delivered. He also reflected on the speed at which the case of David Gaskell (20) - who had been involved in the death of student Andrew O'Neill in Liverpool on 27 November - had been progressed in Liverpool Crown Court.

Delay

"Yesterday we had someone [Gaskell] jailed for nine and a half years for running over and knocking down a young fellow from Tyrone [O'Neill]. I couldn't believe how quickly the case was dealt with. This just happened before the start of December and here we were, in court yesterday [18 Jan 2011] in Liverpool and he was sentenced to nine and a half years.

"The one thing I have difficulty with is the speed of the judicial process. People are facing serious charges - yet it may take two years before we get closure on these cases, which to me is unacceptable. It's extraordinary and you wouldn't see it happen anywhere else but here," said the seasoned journalist.

Darwin Templeton explored the issue of what made a good story for the media indicating that in most cases, it was the human element.

"You can ask what makes a good story in terms of criminal justice, what makes a good story in terms of education or health and its the people. When you strip it all away, the vital element in any good story is the people whether the person you are talking about is an offender, a victim or a judge," he explained.



"The one thing I have great difficulty with is the speed of the judicial progress in this country"
Deric Henderson, PA



Noel Doran indicated that from his perspective, a key factor in what made a story was whether or not it told Irish News readers something they didn't already know, if it impacted on their life or made them stop and think.

Engagement

The panel also explored the benefits engaging with the media could have in terms of impacting on news coverage and the difficulties that could arise when engagement did not occur.

Speaking to the point UTV's Rob Morrison said: "You will build up some degree of trust and you'll build a degree of improvement in getting your message across by engaging with the media."

He also addressed the problems that can arise when agencies are perceived as reluctant to engage with the media, particularly on difficult issues such as the handling of the Donagh sexual abuse cases.

"I think what [the agencies] need to realise is that you do need to engage with the media. I can't think of a better example in the past 20 years [than Donagh] where there has been such a gulf between what the media has been saying and what you as agencies were trying to say," said Mr Morrison.

"You got a sense that no-one wished to put their head above the parapet. I would suggest this was a fundamental mistake - somebody has to take a lead and deal with the media and someone has to explain to the media," said the UTV representative.



"In spite of the burgeoning industry around criminal justice in terms of press officers, communications divisions, it's probably harder now to get information than it ever has been"

Darwin Templeton, News Letter



Dr Michael Maguire (centre) pictured with senior journalists who took part in the CJI Stakeholder Conference. Pictured from left are: Noel Doran, Rob Morrison, Deric Henderson, Liam Creagh (Conference MC), Vincent Kearney and Darwin Templeton.



Darwin Templeton explores the issue of access to information.

No transparency

His views on the Donagh cases were echoed by Vincent Kearney, who explained he had found 'no openness and no transparency.'

"It was almost as if the multi-agency approach was used as an excuse for there to be no accountability. No-one wanted to answer the questions we wanted answered and the public wanted answered," said the well-known broadcaster.

When this occurred the BBC representative told the conference that "the agencies had become part of the story."



"Far too many organisations see journalism as the enemy and see that engagement is not the way to go"

Rob Morrison, UTV



"There was a lot of talk at the time about negative media coverage but this could have been negated very easily if the agencies had actually spoken to us," he reflected.

His view that information can at times be difficult to get was echoed by Darwin Templeton who offered the following insight.

"In spite of the burgeoning industry around criminal justice in terms of press officers and communications divisions it's probably harder now to get information than it ever has been.

"I find that when you drill down and you try and get to the detail and to get to the nuggets of information, suddenly the shutters come down. The presumption in general is against telling the media," he remarked.



"I think it is possible to tell positive stories but there has to be a bit of thinking as to how you tell them and sometimes simply sending out a press release isn't enough"

Vincent Kearney, BBC

Bad news vs. good news

Addressing the issue of why 'bad news' and 'critical reports' seemed to dominate instead of positive stories, Vincent Kearney indicated that it was incorrect to say that 'positive stories' were not carried by the media.

"In terms of reports, they become a story when they show an organisation is not doing what it should be doing. It's the media's job to then step in and question why they're not and to hold them to account.

"It's however incorrect to say that we don't do positive stories," he said adding that "it is possible to tell



positive stories but there has to be a bit of thinking as to how you tell them and sometimes sending out a press release isn't enough."

Speaking on this topic, Noel Doran indicated that he felt the way life was bad news was more likely to make people "sit up and take notice than good news" but at the same time there "has to be a place for good news in the paper."



"There has to be a place for good news in the paper"

Noel Doran, Irish News



"I know there's a lot of talk about negative media coverage but that could have been negated very easily if agencies had spoken to us"

Vincent Kearney, BBC referring to the handling of the Donagh sexual abuse cases



Stakeholder Conference 2011



Irish News editor Noel Doran responds to a question.

The Media Panel - Question & Answer Session

The spotlight turned on the media during an open question and answer session which took place during the morning of the conference.

The first question looked at the issue of public interest, how it was defined and whether or not members of the media had ever chosen to 'hold back a story'.

Responding for the Press Association, Deric Henderson revealed that yes, journalists did on occasions hold back stories.

"Very often we meet people in the course of our work or perhaps socially who will very often tell journalists stories on an 'off the record' basis. Unless they [the journalists] can stand them up 'on the record', they are generally set to one side," he said.

Mr Henderson chose to illustrate the point further by reflecting on the delicate nature of the negotiations which had taken place between the various political parties in Northern Ireland in an effort to get a Northern Ireland Executive up and running following on from the Belfast Agreement.

Question 2 - Engaging and building trust

Moving on CJI's Dr Michael Maguire asked Noel Doran, editor of the Irish News what needed to happen to allow engagement between journalists and the criminal justice system to occur and how trust could be built, especially when contrasting stories supporting reform and others opposing it could appear creating a negative atmosphere?

Responding to the question, Mr Doran indicated that trust "builds up over a period of time through human relationships.

"If people on both sides think they are getting fair play, if people on both sides have respect for each other it will develop and always does develop. But the sheer volume of people out there makes it very very difficult for that process of trust to build up and for that sort of engagement to develop," he reflected.

Mr Doran pointed to the small number of reporters working in Northern Ireland which would help in building up relationships before adding that agencies had to be prepared to 'take the rough with the smooth.'

"There will always be stories that some people don't like whether it's in connection with prisons or any other area, but they are public interest issues... they are things that people need to know," he said.

Darwin Templeton, editor of the News Letter indicated that in his publication frequently decisions were based not around whether a story was of public interest, but whether it would be of interest to the readership of the News Letter - a situation which could create conflict with a criminal justice agency.

The individual nature of each newspaper and broadcast news outlet and the need to tailor their content accordingly was also emphasised by Rob Morrison from UTV.



"There will always be stories that some people don't like whether it's in connection with prisons or any other area, but they are public interest issues... they are things that people need to know"

Noel Doran, Irish News





Prof Monica McWilliams poses a question.

"We all have our own readership or viewership and at the end of the day we're making programmes and producing papers for the people who are going to consume them," he said.

Vincent Kearney explained that the BBC saw its role as to question and hold criminal justice organisations to account. This, he said was the basis of how judgements were made around the public interest of a story.

"Journalists here strive for accuracy. But we can only be accurate if there is a two way [communication] street - if people will talk to us and be open and speak to us both on an 'on' and 'off the record' basis. That requires trust but it really is worth working on from your point of view and certainly from ours," he remarked.

Question 3 - Dealing with victims and families

Exploring the issue of how the media could handle tragic situations in a sensitive manner, one delegate asked how such sensitive handling could be made the rule rather than the exception, especially when it came to dealing with the families and victims of serious, violent crimes.

Reflecting on this issue, Deric Henderson stated that it called for responsible reporting by the papers and broadcasters.

Agreeing with his colleague on the panel, Darwin Templeton stressed that members of the media were "open to talking to people around issues surrounding victim's families" and the most appropriate way of dealing with situations where reporters sought to engage with a victim's family.

The need and desire for victim's families to speak, and to willingly tell the story about their loved one was also raised by Vincent Kearney.

Question 4 - Holding the media to account

Turning to the issue of accountability, the panel outlined the two oversight bodies who have responsibility for the media.

Ofcom is the regulatory body for broadcast organisations. It produces a broadcast code to provide guidelines for operation which help to shape the bounds of taste, decency and privacy. Issues surrounding accuracy, impartiality and balance are also outlined for broadcasters and members of the public. When members of the public or agencies believe the code has been breached, complaints can be made to Ofcom who will then investigate.

A copy of the broadcast code and further details about Ofcom can be found on their website - www.ofcom.org.uk.

Oversight of the print media is carried out by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) which again provides guidelines and a code of conduct which journalists working for a newspaper or magazine are required to adhere to.

Further information on the role of the PCC, the Editor's Code of Conduct and how it handles complaints can be found on its website - www.pcc.org.uk.

Delegates at Table 19 prepare a question for the panel.



Question 5 - The impact of the headline

As the question and answer session moved into its final phase, the media representatives were asked if they ever regretted any of the headlines which had appeared or their use of language in terms of the impact it could have, especially in relation to victims and engaging with offenders.

Darwin Templeton tackled the issue head on, admitting that he probably regretted a headline every day.

"You have to remember that newspapers are put together in rather hectic and chaotic circumstances and the closer to the deadline you get, the more hectic and more chaotic it becomes.

"Many times in my career I have looked back and looked at a headline and cringed but sometimes when the pressure is on, you have to come up with something, you have to come up with a form of words.

"It sounds good at the time and then in the cold light of the next day you realise there's a connotation that you missed... an impact on somebody that you weren't aware of," he said.

His comments were echoed by Noel Doran who agreed that he too had regretted headlines that had appeared in his paper.

"I suppose we have to be realistic, [a headline] is an essential part of the presentation of a news story. It's intended to draw the eye and to offer a very short summary, but reflecting every nuance of a 500 word story in five words is a skill. Sometimes you get it right, sometimes you get it wrong," he said.

Question 6 - Damaging public confidence

The issue of negative portrayal of the criminal justice system and the impact it could have for agencies working to increase public confidence in the system was also addressed.

Responding, Vincent Kearney stressed that journalists reported on the facts and that their role was not to act as a cheerleader for the criminal justice system.

"We're here to report on it [the criminal justice system] accurately and fairly but you can't expect us to cheerlead," he said.

Mr Kearney also stressed that positives were carried but unfortunately, on many occasions the positives in terms of being newsworthy were outweighed by more critical elements.

Rob Morrison also reiterated the desire of his news organisations to report on the positives within the criminal justice system when they came but, he urged the delegates present not to 'shoot the messenger' in terms of negative stories.

Question 7 - Learning from mistakes

Reflecting on the recent coverage of how Northern Ireland Water had handled the loss of supply to thousands of homes and businesses across Northern Ireland over the Christmas period, one delegate asked if there were any lessons that criminal justice agencies could learn.

Responding to the question, Deric Henderson said that from a media point of view the initial handling of the incident had been "a complete and utter fiasco" as the organisation had failed to communicate with people.

In terms of learning for the future, Mr Henderson spoke of the need for agencies to take ownership of difficult issues and to engage with the media so that they were involved in setting the news agenda rather than following it.



**"If you like him great,
if you don't you can
switch him off"**

**Deric Henderson on the BBC's
*Stephen Nolan Show***

Question 8 - The Nolan Factor

The final question put to the media panel related to the impact of BBC Radio Ulster's *Stephen Nolan Show* and whether it represented the best of journalism in Northern Ireland.

Irish News editor Noel Doran said he felt Irish News readers were less than fascinated with the broadcaster and that while he had 'carved out a niche for himself' he would 'leave him to get on with it'.

Vincent Kearney indicated that in terms of public interest, the *Stephen Nolan Show* was a very big show because 'the public is interested in much of what he does'.

"Quite often the reason he gets to be so controversial and critical is perhaps because some agencies he's dealing with aren't as open and transparent with him as they should be which gives him an in."

However the Home Affairs Correspondent was keen to highlight that "he's one part of the BBC and I'm another".

Addressing the same issue, UTV's Rob Morrison urged organisations to assess whether or not it was in the best interest of their individual organisations to take part in the show in order to get their message across.

"You have to make a decision as to how you want to get your message across and where you want to get your message across and remember, that there are plenty more opportunities than the *Stephen Nolan Show* to do that," he advised.

Turning to the final panel member, PA's Deric Henderson was asked for his opinion.

After outlining the difference between Stephen Nolan the person and Stephen Nolan the radio persona, Mr Henderson reflected that the *Stephen Nolan Show* had a huge audience which could not be ignored.

"He's there and if you like him great, if you don't you can switch him off", he concluded reminding the audience that it was in their power to choose whether or not to listen or engage with the show.



Pauline McCabe raises an issue with Dr Michael Maguire at Table 4.



Delegates at Table 9 consider the views of the journalists.



Phil Tooze shares his views on what he heard with fellow delegates.

Stakeholder Conference 2018

Confidence and Accountability

The Justice Committee Panel

Representatives of the Committee for Justice who participated in a panel discussion included (from left) David McNarry MLA, Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley MLA, Alban Maginness MLA and Raymond McCartney MLA. Also pictured is Dr Michael Maguire, CJI.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland was pleased to welcome members of Northern Ireland's first Committee for Justice to participate in this year's Stakeholder Conference.

Representing all four political parties on the Committee was the Chairman Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley MLA (DUP), deputy Chairman Raymond McCartney MLA (SF), David McNarry MLA (UUP) and Alban Maginness MLA (SDLP).

The discussion kicked off with each panel member providing an overview of the first 100 days of the Committee for Justice.

Alban Maginness MLA indicated that the first 100 days of the Committee had exceeded his anticipated view.

"I think it has worked tremendously well in a very, very short period of time. I think it has been relatively non-partisan and we have worked together very constructively. That part of it is due to the good will that exists amongst the Committee members towards one another. There has been a sense of collegiality within the Committee and I think that is a very, very good starting point," he said.

The SDLP representative also praised the performance of the Committee Chairman.



"I want a criminal justice system that is delivering for the people of Northern Ireland and I want a criminal justice system that people have confidence in"

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley MLA

Lord Morrow reflects on the first 100 days of the Committee for Justice.

Raymond McCartney MLA opened his remarks by paying tribute to Lord Morrow and the honourable way in which he had steered the Committee since it was established.

Moving on, the Foyle representative spoke of the number of agencies involved in the criminal justice system. He went on to highlight the work on-going on the Justice Bill and the fact that each Committee member had brought to the Bill their own politics, their own party policy and the Committee had provided the space for all to air their views.

Reflecting on his own position as Chairman, Lord Morrow MLA said that from the outset he had "consciously made a decision that I would make an honest attempt to run the Committee in as fair and open and transparent way that I could."

He also indicated that he believed the Committee members had applied themselves to the job before them and that the work to date had been undertaken in a constructive way and in a constructive mood.

"If we can keep that going, I think it augers well for the future of the Justice Committee," he said.

David McNarry MLA reflected on the spirit of teamwork that had been evident within the Committee during its initial 100 days and the challenges it had presented.

"It's a Committee that to me, has brought different emotions than I am used to and the challenges which go with them. It's a great privilege for me to be on it and I think there is a lot of good work that needs to be done" he said.

Mr McNarry went on to highlight the learning that could be gained from being part of the Justice Committee, especially as locally elected representatives were now being asked to legislate on justice matters.



Accountability

Lord Morrow addressed the issue of accountability and the need for effective accountability within the Justice Committee.

"I believe that the Committee's role first of all is to hold the Minister [of Justice] to account - that's our primary role. With all the different agencies, justice is very fragmented. I didn't realise until I got into it that there were so many strands and aspects [of justice] and quite frankly, I was taken aback. That was a learning curve for me right away," he revealed.

The DUP representative added that his aim was to work with people to understand why they were doing the things they were doing.

Moving on to look at whether accountability could have a negative effect, conference MC Liam Creagh asked Raymond McCartney if it could lead to criminal justice organisations becoming more risk adverse.

"I would like to think that wouldn't be the case," said the Sinn Féin representative in response, "because I think accountability allows ourselves, the people who we represent, and the officials to have a sense that what they are doing is as we have agreed," he said.

He went on to explain that he felt accountability was "healthy" and that no-one should feel they need to be risk adverse.



"I think we have a responsibility on us as public representatives to ensure we have a better and fair justice system and that's what we have to do"

**Raymond McCartney
MLA**



“I might be able to make a difference to somebody’s life or a whole lot of people’s lives and that’s very, very important”

David McNarry MLA

Understanding

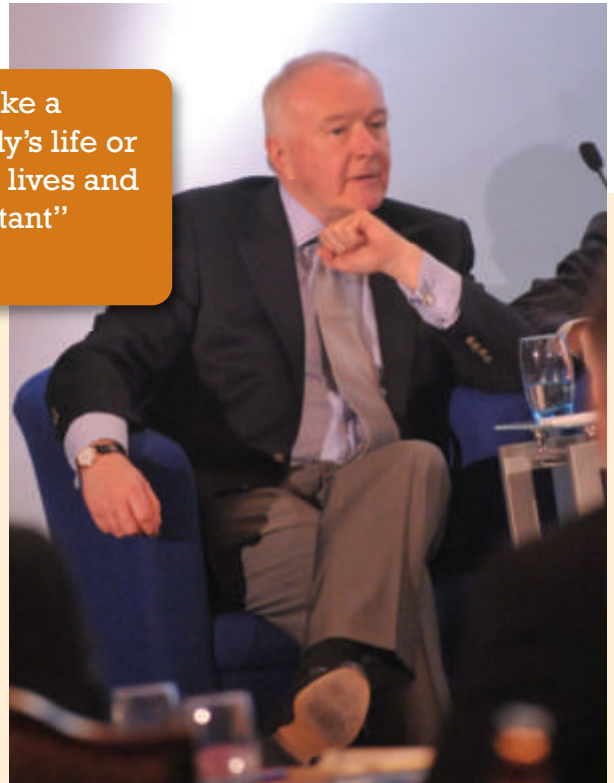
Reflecting on how the experience of appearing before the Committee for Justice can be perceived, Mr McCartney encouraged agency representatives to approach it in a positive manner.

“We’re not there to trip them [the representatives] up or catch them out but to try and get an understanding,” he explained.

“I think the amount of work that is and has been carried out [to date] with the justice agencies is massive and what we’re trying to get in the Committee is an appreciation of that work. We want to understand why certain things have and are being done in a specific way,” he added.

Picking up on how appearing before the Committee for Justice can feel, Alban Maginness MLA said that questions from the Committee tended not to be similar in fashion to a cross examination.

During the discussion local MLAs were invited to share with delegates attending the conference what frustrated them most about the justice sector in Northern Ireland.



David McNarry indicated that his two key sources of frustration were the difference between operational activity and management direction and the inability of the Committee to bring representatives of the judiciary or the Chief Constable before the Committee to give evidence.

Looking to the future, Alban Maginness said he felt the Committee for Justice wished to try different things with a view to improvement. He added that he felt the Committee had a role to play in doing that.

“The Assembly has been designed to create partnership among all the political parties representing the whole community here in Northern Ireland.

“I think there is a spirit of partnership in the Committee and if it continues, we can be successful in addressing the very serious challenges affecting us here in Northern Ireland in terms of justice,” he concluded.

**Alban Maginness
MLA outlines
his views on
the Justice
Committee’s
role.**





Justice Committee Panel - Question & Answer Session

In the final session of the afternoon, CJI's Stakeholder Conference delegates were given the opportunity to pose questions to the panel of elected representatives from the Committee for Justice.

Kick-starting the discussion, the first question from the floor sought to establish what were the headline challenges for the criminal justice system.



Justice Minister David Ford MLA, chats with HMCPSI Chief Inspector Michael Fuller.

Speaking in response Lord Morrow MLA said: "I want a criminal justice system that is delivering for the people of Northern Ireland and I want a criminal justice system that people have confidence in and they feel that it is a system they can identify [with] and sign up to. We have to ensure our criminal justice system is not

only fit for purpose and it doesn't only do the job but is seen to do the job," he said.

The Justice Committee Chairman continued by indicating that he felt the criminal justice system still had to explain itself to the public at large and tell them how and why they [the agencies] operate in the way they do.

He concluded his remarks saying that he believed the system also needed to demonstrate to the public that it was up for change and up to delivering a better service.



Question 2 - Joint working

The second question of the day to the panel members centred around the theme of joint working - especially in relation to young people.

"Does the Justice Committee have any plans to collaborate with or seek to influence the education and social departments or committees to help prevent young people coming into contact with the justice system?" one delegate asked.

Raymond McCartney MLA indicated that the role of the Committee was not only to scrutinise the Department [of Justice] but to also provide advice and support. He stressed it was incumbent on the Committee to ensure that proper budgets were in place across Departments.

"If people tell us that many of our young people because of a lack of literacy, because of a lack of employment or skills find themselves more susceptible to becoming involved in criminal activity and then going into the criminal justice system, we have to be saying to ourselves we have to do all in our power to put in place the resources that are required," he stated.

"I think in terms of the Committee members, we would assist anyone who can say to us that what they are trying to do is to ensure that our young people get a fair chance and we can keep them out of the criminal justice system," added the Foyle MLA.

Question 3 - Increasing understanding

As the question and answer session continued, one delegate asked the panel about the role they had in educating the public and helping them to understand how and why the system works the way it does to ensure victims particularly, didn't have unrealistic expectations which could lead to further disappointment?

Addressing the point, Lord Morrow said that he was looking forward to having more contact with the public but unfortunately this had not been possible to date because of the Committee's workload.



"I believe that the scrutiny that the Committee can bring and does bring should be to the benefit of the community as a whole and indeed, for those who feel they're being scrutinised too"

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley MLA

Question 4 - Taking the politics out of criminal justice

One delegate attending the CJI Stakeholder Conference was keen to seek the views of the locally elected politicians as to whether they could see a situation where the politics could be taken out of criminal justice, so that matters could be dealt with by a more 'evidence-based' approach.

Addressing the issue which was to divide the panel, Raymond McCartney was the first to respond.

"The straightforward answer is yes we should take the politics out of it, but I think the nature of the beast is that sometimes there will be some politics involved. There are a number of challenges [for criminal justice] and we may disagree as to how those challenges need to be faced and how we move them forward.

"I think what we need to do is listen to the arguments, the challenges, the expectation and the plans and then make a judgment in an objective way.

"We're a political party, we're conscious of our party policy and the people whom we represent, but we can if you like be politically neutral when it comes to doing the right thing," he said.

Responding to the same question David McNarry MLA said he did not believe politics could be taken out of criminal justice.

"I think what we're doing is entirely down to what you let us do, what you permit us to do and make us accountable for. Politics is in every walk of life," he said.

Giving his view on the same question Lord Morrow said: "I think that might be a very noble aspiration but as it has already been said on this panel, we all come from different political backgrounds and we all bring to the table something different, but I don't think it's possible to take the politics out of it."

Alban Maginness MLA provided a different perspective.

"If the intent is to take partisan or party political politics out of certain issues, I think we can do that.

"It's a matter of trying to debate and work through the issues to reach a political consensus. In that sense I think that partisan politics or party politics is in fact put to one side, and we work on issues and try and reach a common answer to problems," he said.



**“For the first time
I really feel like
a legislator”**

Alban Maginness MLA

Question 5 - Dealing with media hype

Looking back at the morning session involving senior journalists from Northern Ireland one delegate enquired as to the panel's thinking around media hype involving the criminal justice system.

Referring to the impact of the *Stephen Nolan Show*, Alban Maginness reflected that the programme created “a platform for airing issues and bringing matters to the surface which served a purpose.”

However he warned that as the programme tended to “flit like a butterfly” from one day to another looking at different issues, they were not dealt with in any great depth.

Commenting on the role a politician can often find themselves in, Mr Maginness argued that he felt “most politicians would attempt at least to exercise a degree of responsibility,” when providing a contribution.

Raymond McCartney suggested that the most impactful way of trying to inform people was to ensure that people who are listening feel that you are making a valid point.

“I would say I now have a better understanding of aspects of the criminal justice system which in the past, I may have had a very simplistic and perhaps critical view,” he said.

Question 6 - Engaging with the judiciary

As the question session came to an end, the panel members were asked for their view on how they could influence and improve governance arrangements within the judiciary when the Committee was unable to access the people at the core of that service.

Alban Maginness indicated that while he recognised the judiciary was autonomous, he felt having an interface with the judiciary was not an unreasonable thing to expect.

“I think judges should come to our Committee. I think the Lord Chief Justice should come so we can ask them [the judges] questions as we would of any other public body or public official. I think that would be helpful,” he said.

Question 7 - The future

The final question to the panel looked to the future role of the Committee and what it's involvement in stimulating and promoting new thinking in justice was?

Lord Morrow in his response said that he believed committee's such as the Justice Committee and those in relation to other departments had a vital and influential role to play in articulating their thinking.

Committee colleague Raymond McCartney indicated that in his view the [next] Committee would have the power to initiate a number of enquiries and those enquiries should reflect the views of the Committee in the aspects of criminal justice it could bring new thinking to.

“It should not just be a scrutiny Committee. As a Committee we should also be bringing advice and assistance to the Department. That's where the new thinking should come from,” he concluded.

Evaluation and Feedback

The departure of CJI's 2011 Stakeholder Conference from a traditional format provided the highest level of feedback to date from delegates who attended.

Views were mixed with some delegates enjoying the new format which focused around panel discussions and open question and answer sessions. Others felt previous conferences where a number of speakers had been invited to address the event on specific topics had been more beneficial.

The majority of respondents who took the time to complete an evaluation form either on the day or on-line after the event indicated they were 'satisfied' with the conference and had found it to be informative.

Feedback suggested that delegates would like the Inspectorate to continue hosting the Conference and most would attend the event again and recommend it to others.

Speaking after the event, CJI's Chief Inspector Dr Michael Maguire said: "I would pass on my thanks to everyone who provided CJI with feedback on this event. We have looked in detail at all the comments made and will be taking the views expressed on board as we have done in the past.

"This feedback is vital and the learning it can provide for the future is very welcome," he said.

In a direct response to the feedback, CJI will from April 2011 be moving towards distributing the majority of its inspection reports, follow-up reviews and other documents electronically.

"We have over the past few years asked Stakeholders how they would like to receive information from CJI and the overwhelming majority have indicated that their preference would be via email," said Dr Maguire.

"From the start of the new financial year, CJI will be producing fewer hard copies of its reports and will be working to expand the use of its website and email.

"I would urge anyone who wishes to receive information from the Inspectorate to ensure that we have your up to date email address so that you are included in our mailing list," he said.

To provide CJI with your contact details or to provide a new email address please visit the 'Keep me Informed' section of the CJI website - www.cjini.org or email Amanda Hannan at CJI directly on amanda.hannan@cjini.org.



Thompson House's David Farrow and James Corrigan (CJI) consider the panelists views.



Maura Campbell (DoJ) listens to the views of colleagues.



Derek Williamson (CJI) and Al Hutchinson in conversation with Bertha McDougall



Dr Michael Maguire and Nick Perry, Permanent Secretary Department of Justice.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE INSPECTION NORTHERN IRELAND

14 Great Victoria Street

Belfast BT2 7BA

www.cjini.org