

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all



NORTHERN IRELAND
PRISON SERVICE



PPS



PBNI



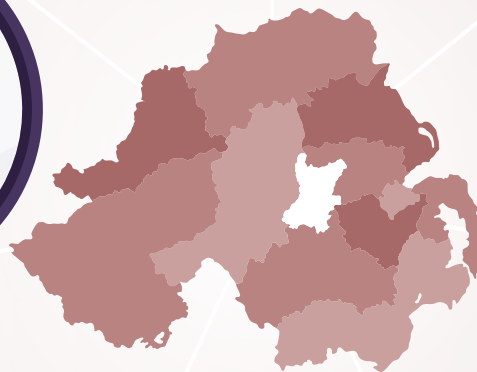
Northern Ireland
Courts and
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www.courtsni.gov.uk



Forensic
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KEY FACTS

TRANSFORMING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

NOVEMBER 2024



WHAT WAS THIS REVIEW ABOUT?

- Transforming the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland is a priority and aspiration for all the agencies and organisations in the criminal justice system.
- It has proven challenging for a system that is difficult to navigate and involves organisations and leaders that have operational independence, different operating models, workforces, budget and governance arrangements.
- This inspection looked at the transformation journey to date, the lessons to be learned and the opportunities to improve how leaders invent the future.

WHAT DID WE LOOK AT?

- Inspectors looked at the strategic approaches to transformation of the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS), the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI).
- We heard about the number of strategies that were considered transformative by the different criminal justice organisations, the Criminal Justice Board's five priorities and how they linked together and how they were communicated to everyone who needed to know about them. We also looked at the outcomes they achieved.
- We looked at how programmes and projects were led and governed as well as the competing demands on leaders and decision makers in the criminal justice system to deliver transformation alongside service delivery.





HOW DID WE CARRY OUT THIS INSPECTION

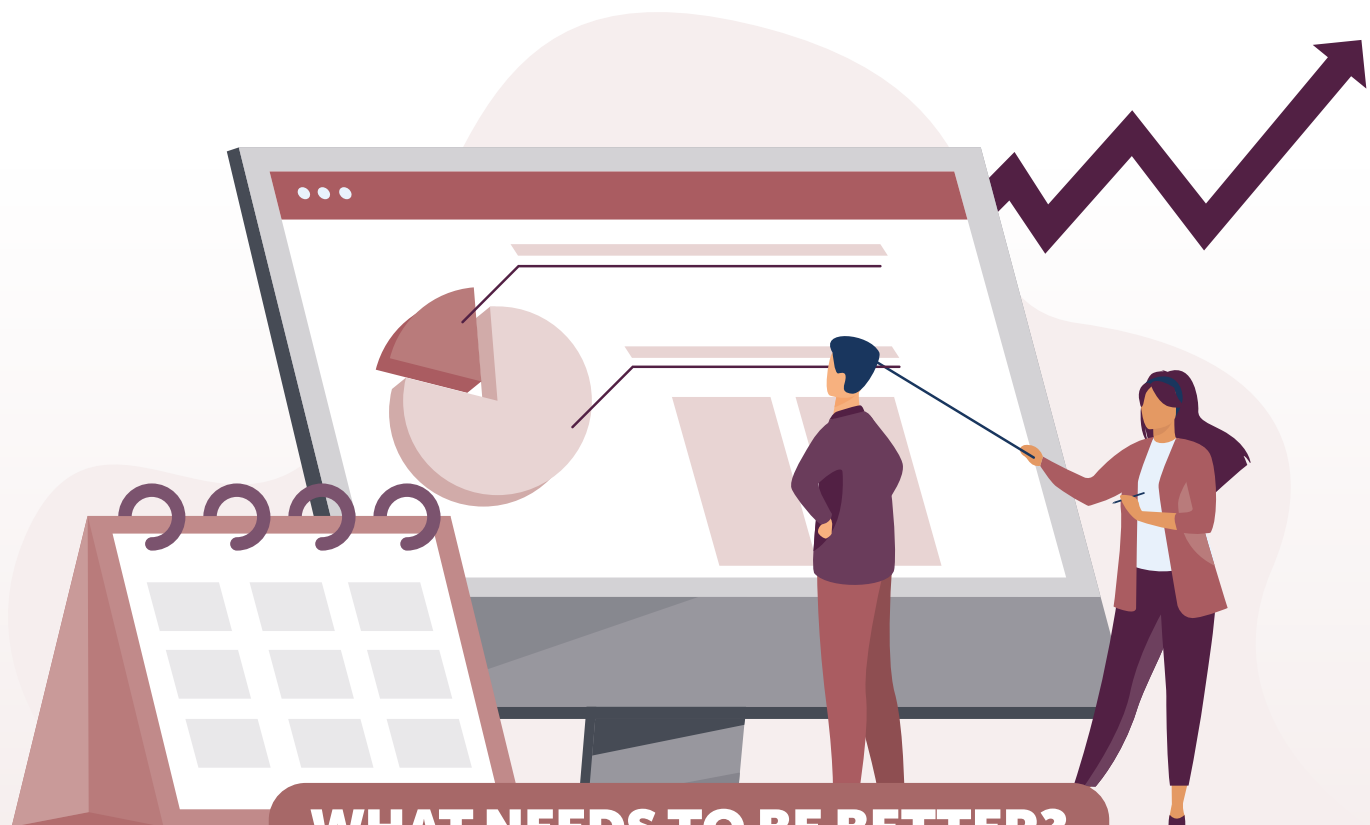
- Inspectors reviewed policies and strategies that each criminal justice organisation considered to be transformative. We also analysed data and evidence provided by the organisations showing outcomes that have been achieved.
- We spoke with leaders in each of the inspected organisations and other stakeholders to hear their views.
- Evidence from previous and current CJI inspections and research into the strategic approaches used by the criminal justice organisations was used to inform our thinking and judgements.



WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- A huge number of strategies had been developed since the devolution of justice in 2010 to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly (NI Executive/ NI Assembly).
- The Minister of Justice and DoJ inherited a criminal justice system that had historic significant areas for improvement including reducing delay, access to justice, victim and witness care and effective rehabilitation of offenders when justice was devolved.
- Change had been slow and strong leadership, coupled with a working NI Executive and Assembly, was needed to give the DoJ and criminal justice organisations the legalisation and investment in technology and resources to tackle the areas requiring reform and improvement.
- The combined absence of the NI Assembly for prolonged periods, annual budget allocations and need for business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic added to the challenges criminal justice organisations faced.
- Some criminal justice organisations were focused on maintaining their operational independence and decision making while seeking to work with others to secure improvement.
- The creation of new organisations, reform of youth justice and a reduction in children in custody and in the Youth Court, the implementation of technology and Causeway data sharing platform across the five main criminal justice organisations, the use of video links for Court proceedings and the NIPS culture shift to focus on people in their care and preventing reoffending were key achievements.
- Investment and development in technology in individual organisations did not always consider the impact on other criminal justice system organisations. The significant investment in technology aligned with many strategies had not delivered the desired outcomes to reduce delay and improve access to justice.
- Inspectors did not find clear evidence of an agreed strategic vision, prioritisation and control of how the entire criminal justice system would be transformed, other than incrementally, by the many strategies and working groups that had been established.
- There was limited improvement in how the criminal justice system was performing, the experience for victims, witnesses and defendants and those working in the criminal justice system since 2010.





WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors have made three recommendations for improvement including:

At a strategic (leadership) level...

- Within six months from the publication of this report, the DoJ should facilitate Criminal Justice Board members' agreement of a shared future vision and strategic priorities to deliver transformational change and innovation across the criminal justice system. These should be clearly communicated and reflected appropriately in organisations' Corporate and Business Plans.

At an operational (on the ground) level...

- The PSNI Strategic Transformation Board should continue to monitor and regularly review the leadership and governance of transformational strategies and projects across all organisational areas, to maximise the benefits of centralisation, avoid duplication and ensure alignment with agreed strategic priorities.
- Within six months from the publication of this report the DoJ, members of the Criminal Justice Board, the Director General of the NIPS and the Chief Executives of the PBNI, FSNI and Youth Justice Agency should review the purpose and membership of existing programme and project boards, working groups and other fora with the aim of reducing duplication to release capacity. This should be aligned with the prioritisation outlined in this report's Strategic recommendation. Appropriate staff resource capacity and skills required for meaningful participation and decision-making authorities should also be considered



WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN NOW?

We want to see criminal justice leaders successfully transform the criminal justice system to improve outcomes for citizens who use its services and support the people who work in it. This will require a clear vision and priorities owned by every partner, working together well and maximising the use of available resources, while respecting each other's independence to improve the entire justice system.



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

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