



AN INSPECTION OF  
**THE POLICE SERVICE  
OF NORTHERN  
IRELAND'S USE  
OF COMMUNITY  
RESOLUTION  
NOTICES**

**OCTOBER 2025**



# AN INSPECTION OF **THE POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S USE OF COMMUNITY RESOLUTION NOTICES**

---

**October 2025**

Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under Section 49(2) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, as amended by paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 13 to The Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010 by the Department of Justice.

# CONTENTS

List of abbreviations	4
Chief Inspector's Foreword	5
Executive summary	7
Recommendations	10
<b>Inspection Report</b>	
Chapter 1 Introduction	12
Chapter 2 Strategy and governance	18
Chapter 3 Delivery	37
Chapter 4 Outcomes	57
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1 Outcomes assigned to crimes recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland 2015-16 to 2023-24	66
Appendix 2 Offences eligible for Community Resolution Notices	67
Appendix 3 Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes recorded with a hate motivation 2015-16 to 2023-24	69
Appendix 4 Methodology	72
Appendix 5 Terms of reference	74

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ASBO(s)</b>	Anti-Social Behaviour Order(s)
<b>CBRJ</b>	Community Based Restorative Justice
<b>CJI</b>	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
<b>CRN(s)</b>	Community Resolution Notice(s)
<b>DoJ</b>	Department of Justice
<b>ECHR</b>	European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
<b>FPN</b>	Fixed Penalty Notice(s)
<b>HMICFRS</b>	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Services (in England and Wales)
<b>HMI Probation</b>	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (in England and Wales)
<b>LPT</b>	Local Policing Team (within the PSNI)
<b>NICHE</b>	The Police Service of Northern Ireland Records Management System
<b>NIPB</b>	Northern Ireland Policing Board
<b>NMO</b>	Non-Molestation Order
<b>NPCC</b>	National Police Chiefs' Council
<b>NPT</b>	Neighbourhood Policing Team (within the PSNI)
<b>OEL</b>	Officer Enquiry Log
<b>OPONI</b>	Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
<b>PCSP</b>	Policing and Community Safety Partnership
<b>PND</b>	Penalty Notice for Disorder
<b>PPN</b>	Public Protection Notice
<b>PPS</b>	Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
<b>PSNI</b>	Police Service of Northern Ireland
<b>VRAM</b>	Vulnerability Risk Assessment Matrix
<b>YDO</b>	Youth Diversion Officer (within the PSNI)
<b>YJA</b>	Youth Justice Agency
<b>YOT</b>	Youth Offending Team

**Note:** Electronic links to documents and information sources referenced within this report are correct at time of publication but may be subject to change where the information is outside CJI's control.

# CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

People who commit crimes should never be allowed to think they have got away with it and there are no consequences to breaking the law. However, that doesn't mean that every offence must be prosecuted through the Courts to achieve justice for victims or the impact of their crime felt by offenders.

Out of Court disposals have an important part to play in our criminal justice system and can be an effective way of dealing with less serious crime. They are designed to be a more immediate sanction and speed up dealing with crime with less process, paperwork and cost. But it is vital they are used appropriately in our community in a way that recognises the fair application of police discretion as an important part of building confidence in the criminal justice system.

At a time when there are high volumes of outstanding cases in our Crown Courts and significant systemic delay across all criminal Courts, it is important that Court resources are used effectively including when they are needed most. Expanding out of Court disposals is also one of the five key projects in the Department of Justice's *Speeding Up Justice Programme*. So it is important there is a wider and more transparent conversation with the public about their use, the outcomes they aim to achieve and their place as effective sanctions in our criminal justice system.

It can't be just about what is quick and easy, it has to be about what is right and proportionate to address offending behaviour and support desistance.

That doesn't mean that keeping cases out of Court is unfettered. There needs to be transparency and accountability in the use of Community Resolution Notices, and all other forms of disposal through the use of police discretion, that recognises the impact on victims, offenders and our community. That's why securing meaningful feedback from victims is vital, as what they say about their experience has a ripple effect across their community.

This Inspection Report makes three Strategic and two Operational recommendations as well as four Areas for Improvement to strengthen oversight and provide assurance about how Community Resolution Notices are used appropriately to address offending behaviour and the potential they have to help create safer communities.

My thanks particularly to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, Youth Justice Agency and the Department of Justice for their support and co-operation during this inspection, and to the stakeholder organisations

who took the time to meet with Criminal Justice Inspection to inform this inspection.

This Inspection was led by Dr Roisin Devlin supported by Muireann Bohill; I am grateful for their work.



**Jacqui Durkin**

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice  
in Northern Ireland

**October 2025**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Community Resolutions

At the time of this inspection, Community Resolution Notices had become the most common out of Court disposal to resolve crimes in Northern Ireland. Introduced in June 2016, they were the only informal out of Court disposal recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The objectives had been to 'speed up' justice by offering a proportionate outcome to 'lower level' offending and a more suitable outcome for victims. Unlike a formal out of Court disposal such as a Caution, a Community Resolution Notice did not result in a criminal record.

Community Resolution Notices were used to resolve 6,593 crimes in Northern Ireland from December 2023 to November 2024, a decrease from the 7,799 crimes resolved in this way during the previous year.

Community Resolutions were a sanction outcome for approximately seven per cent of offences. The sanction was most used for drugs offences, theft and Violence Against the Person offences. Community Resolutions were available as a sanction outcome for offences involving adults and children from the age of 10 years. Management information from the Police Service of Northern Ireland showed that over four-fifths (83.2%) had been issued to adults in 2023-24 and the remainder to children.

## Governance by the Criminal Justice System

The Police Service of Northern Ireland criteria for the use of Community Resolution was expanded in August 2024. The Out of Court Disposals Working Group was intended to oversee this. It was a subgroup of the Criminal Justice Board's *Speeding Up Justice* Programme and one of its five priority projects. The Working Group was led by the Police Service of Northern Ireland with representation from a range of criminal justice organisations and the Department of Justice. Its membership was committed but still learning how to fulfil its role. It needed to define and drive strategic outcomes intended through Community Resolution expansion. Transparency with stakeholders and the public about the aims of expanding out of Court sanctions and the connection to reducing demand within the formal criminal justice system was needed.

## Governance by the Police Service of Northern Ireland

Governance structures for Community Resolution oversight within the Police Service of Northern Ireland needed strengthened. Individuals held expertise, but the organisation as a whole needed to strategically embed it. Assessment of equality impacts were hampered by a lack of monitoring data and there was no strategic timebound plan to enhance this in relation to Community Resolutions.

Initiatives in development were positive including plans for 'PULSE'<sup>1</sup> to generate District level data and oversight by the senior Local Policing Performance Meeting.

There was evidence of detailed research underpinning the recent expansion of the Community Resolution Notice Guidance with enhanced safeguards including supervisory authorisation in all cases. The Police Service of Northern Ireland Criminal Justice Branch (Criminal Justice Branch) monitored Officers' compliance with the criteria and evidence of robust advice to Officers and Supervisors was found. However, capacity to fulfil this function was weakened due to resourcing pressures. Recent involvement of District Performance and Quality Assurance in dip-sampling Community Resolution Notices was promising. The Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland needed to revive their joint quality assurance model, which had not operated since April 2023. Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland input was important to inform ongoing review and learning.

Student Officer and Probationer training observed by Inspectors was accessible and detailed. The Criminal Justice Branch had secured a place within the District training programme to cover Community Resolutions, which was positive. Stakeholders had received less information about Community Resolutions and there was scope to consult more formally with them on reviewing the approach as the revised Guidance embedded. Publicly available and accessible information about Community Resolution Notices was limited.

## **Delivering Community Resolution Notices**

Police Officers and Supervisors welcomed the revised Guidance as having streamlined the criteria for use of Community Resolution. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) reviewed a sample of cases, which showed evidence of supervisory authorisation. However, non-compliance due to prior offending was evident and there were instances when the use of Community Resolution was wholly inappropriate despite being within scope, were found.

Better supervisor rationale should have prevented this and more thorough checks in relation to the offender's history and victim engagement. This was especially important because the revised Guidance had extended Community Resolution to a greater range of personal crimes, including intimate partner domestic abuse and hate crimes albeit with additional safeguards. Evaluation, and enhanced oversight from the Police Service of Northern Ireland subject matter experts, was necessary before settling permanently on Community Resolution Notices as a mechanism to resolve these types of crimes.

Resolutions had mostly comprised of an apology, with some examples of repair or payment for damage evident. Programmes were limited and there was an opportunity for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, with support from the Out of Court Disposals Working Group, to examine ways to enhance this including the potential for stakeholder input. Resolutions agreed to address some personal crimes were problematic and more targeted quality assurance of these was required.

1 'PULSE' was a Performance Management Framework used by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to provide real-time performance information and analysis (see *PSNI, Horizon 2025, Service Modernisation Plan* available at [horizon-2025-spreads.pdf](#)).

A Community Based Restorative Justice pilot for Community Resolution had been formally running since April 2024. Referral numbers had been disappointing. Leaders needed to grasp the issues and do more to drive the pilot's evaluation and development.

Community Resolution Notices for children required Police Youth Diversion Officer approval and while Police Officers welcomed their input, ongoing monitoring was required to ensure it was sought consistently. Children who received a Community Resolution were often referred to the Youth Justice Agency for completion of a programme. This provided scope for wider needs or concerns to be identified. Police Officers reported opportunities to engage with families through Community Resolution and said parents had been "absolutely fantastic" in support of the approach. There were good examples of Police Officers working with the child, parents and the Youth Diversion Officer to agree resolutions. Not all children who received a Community Resolution Notice were referred to the Youth Justice Agency. The Police Service of Northern Ireland had limited understanding of the reasons for this, and more proactive monitoring would help. Timeliness of referrals to the Youth Justice Agency and confirmation of programme completion was an issue in some cases and would benefit from better oversight.

### **Performance information to drive review**

The numbers of Community Resolution Notices issued each month were reported to the Out of Court Disposals Working Group by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Responsibility for probing the implications of the data and for steering evaluation of expanded use of Community Resolution overall needed shared across the Working Group with more evidence of a challenge function demonstrated from members. The Police Service of Northern Ireland Recorded Crime Outcomes showed variation by District in the use of Community Resolution Notices.

Anecdotally, reasons were offered but patterns were not robustly examined. Understanding the impact of Community Resolution on reoffending was also required. This had not developed since CJI first inspected the use of Discretionary Disposals in 2015. The Police Service of Northern Ireland's Criminal Justice Branch's commitment to review the approach as the revised Guidance embedded and more formally at 12 months following implementation was encouraging. It had plans to gather victims' feedback and early discussions with Victim Support Northern Ireland had taken place to explore this.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within three months of report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should revise its governance arrangements to ensure regular strategic accountability for the use of out of Court disposals including Community Resolution Notices at District level and Assistant Chief Constable level, and that accountability mechanisms include regular reporting and analysis of equality data to monitor appropriateness and equity of use.

**Paragraph 2.21**

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within nine months of report publication, the Criminal Justice Board Out of Court Disposals Working Group should:

- develop a publicly available strategic framework setting out clear aims for the expansion of out of Court disposals including Community Resolution Notices. This should set out the performance measures required to assess if these intended aims have been achieved;
- consult with interested stakeholders on the expansion of out of Court disposals including Community Resolution Notices and the aims to be achieved; and
- ensure publicly available and accessible information about Community Resolution Notices, including the circumstances in which they can be used and the safeguards that apply.

**Paragraph 2.53**

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within one year of report publication, the Criminal Justice Board Out of Court Disposals Working Group should undertake an examination of the quality of Community Resolution Notice outcomes to include reoffending, victim satisfaction and effectiveness of resolutions. This information should drive planning for the availability of effective and proportionate programmes and be used effectively by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to inform Districts how well Community Resolutions are working in their area. An evaluation of the Community Based Restorative Justice Community Resolution Pilot should be included with a view to identifying and addressing any barriers to referrals.

#### Paragraph 4.17

## OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within three months of report publication:

- the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should resume joint quality assurance and oversight of Community Resolution Notice use with evidence of learning; and
- the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in consultation with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, should review current quality assurance mechanisms for cases submitted to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for direction to enable effective oversight of whether all cases were being given due consideration for police disposal, and that these considerations were being recorded within the files submitted.

#### Paragraph 2.45

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should undertake an evaluation of Community Resolution Notices for the following crimes, with a view to re-examining whether inclusion within the authorised list of offences should be retained:

- intimate or former intimate partner domestic abuse. In the meantime, the Public Protection Branch should be involved in oversight of domestic related Community Resolution Notices to include all cases in which a Community Resolution Notice is issued in a case with intimate or former intimate partners; and
- hate related offences to include an examination of whether the hate element was being adequately investigated and recorded. In the meantime, Police Service of Northern Ireland hate crime experts should be involved in oversight of all hate crime related Community Resolution Notices.

#### Paragraph 3.45

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Community Resolution Notices (CRNs) were an informal out of Court police disposal available to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). CRNs, formerly known as Discretionary Disposals, were introduced in June 2016 and were the only informal sanction outcome assigned to crimes recorded by the PSNI. A CRN did not attract a criminal record. There were, however, certain circumstances in which receipt of a CRN was disclosable. This related to enhanced disclosure checks for certain employment roles and potentially as a relevant consideration in formal Court sentencing. A record was also maintained on police systems to inform its response in the event of future offending behaviour.
- 1.2 CRNs had become the main out of Court sanction outcome recorded by the PSNI, while the use of Penalty Notice for Disorder (PND) and Cautions had declined. It was a sanction outcome intended for 'lower level' offences in which the offender accepted responsibility and it was envisioned as a more responsive way to address offending behaviour and meet victims' needs. Like any exercise of police discretion, the legitimacy of use depended on appropriate safeguards being in place both in policy and in practice. This was required to ensure the human rights of potential recipients and the rights and entitlements of victims.
- 1.3 International human rights standards set out important obligations and guidance for law enforcement officers. The *Council of Europe Handbook on the European Convention on Human Rights and Policing* noted that '*in the interest of independent, impartial and effective delivery of policing services, and to protect against political interference, the police are granted a wide degree of discretion in the performance of their duties.*'<sup>2</sup> However, limitations and accountability measures were required. Orders and procedures that clearly established what was expected of law enforcement officers, and effective use of these including robust oversight was essential.
- 1.4 The proper discharge by the State of its human rights duties included the positive obligations within relevant provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), which were applicable within the design of legal frameworks and rules setting out how crimes would be tackled.

<sup>2</sup> *The European Convention on Human Rights and Policing, A Handbook for Police Officers and other Law Enforcement Officials*, Murdoch, J. and Roche, R. Funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe, December 2013 available at <https://book.coe.int/en/human-rights-and-democracy/6839-the-european-convention-on-human-rights-and-policing.html>.

This included the circumstances in which the positive obligations within Article 3 ECHR (freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment) applied. Effective measures to protect against crimes amounting to ill-treatment, and an effective investigation capable of bringing perpetrators of such crimes to justice were required.

- 1.5 Vigilance in relation to all personal crimes was vital particularly in circumstances capable of engaging Article 3 ECHR such as domestic abuse<sup>3</sup> and hate crimes.<sup>4</sup> In cases with a suspected racist motivation, for example, the European Court of Human Rights established the necessity of unmasking any racist motive or prejudice (considering also Article 14 prohibiting discrimination, in conjunction with Article 3 ECHR).<sup>5</sup> In cases of violent crime, failure to pursue the race hate element of an offence had been highlighted:

*'The Court reiterates that when investigating violent incidents, State authorities have the additional duty to take all reasonable steps to unmask any racist motive and to establish whether or not ethnic hatred or prejudice may have played a role in the events. Admittedly, proving racial motivation will often be extremely difficult in practice. The respondent State's obligation to investigate possible racist overtones to a violent act is an obligation to use best endeavors and is not absolute; the authorities must do what is reasonable in the circumstances of the case (see Nachova and Others, cited above, ¶ 160, ECHR 2005-...).*

*The Court considers the foregoing necessarily true also in cases where the treatment contrary to Article 3 of the Convention is inflicted by private individuals. Treating racially induced violence and brutality on an equal footing with cases that have no racist overtones would be turning a blind eye to the specific nature of acts that are particularly destructive of fundamental rights. A failure to make a distinction in the way in which situations that are essentially different are handled may constitute unjustified treatment irreconcilable with Article 14 of the Convention.'*<sup>6</sup>

- 1.6 The PSNI's use and recent revision of operational guidance for CRNs ('the Guidance') was part of a broader approach, involving out of Court disposals, to address avoidable delay, remove lower level offending from the formal prosecution and Court process and improve case progression. Offences with a domestic abuse motivation and those with a hate motivation were within scope for CRNs, albeit in restricted circumstances.

3 European Court of Human Rights, Factsheet – Domestic Violence June 2023 available at [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/fs\\_domestic\\_violence\\_eng](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/fs_domestic_violence_eng).

4 Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, Thematic Factsheet – Hate Crime and Hate Speech, December 2022 available at <https://rm.coe.int/thematic-factsheet-hate-crime-eng-docx/1680a96865>.

5 Nachova and Others v Bulgaria (2005) ECHR available at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/tur#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-69630%22%5D%7D>. See also the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Submission to Hate Crime Review Consultation May 2020 available at [https://nihrc.org/assets/uploads/publications/NIHRC-Hate\\_Crime\\_Review-FINAL\\_002.pdf](https://nihrc.org/assets/uploads/publications/NIHRC-Hate_Crime_Review-FINAL_002.pdf); and

6 Case of Šečić v. Croatia (2007) ECHR available at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-80711%22%5D%7D>.

In these types of cases there was a particular onus on the PSNI to demonstrate steps taken to ensure an effective investigation capable of establishing the facts, including any suspected aggravated hate element, with detailed rationale explaining how a police disposal, as opposed to prosecutorial oversight, was proportionate and effective.

## COMMUNITY RESOLUTION IN ENGLAND AND WALES

- 1.7 Informal out of Court community resolution was available as a possible policing response in England and Wales where the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) published Community Resolutions Guidance for Police 2022 applied.<sup>7</sup> The complexity of the out of Court disposal landscape was recognised by a Home Office Policy on the *Proposed Legislative Reform of the Out of Court Disposals Framework*.<sup>8</sup> Reform aimed to simplify the adult framework to ensure consistency across police forces in the out of Court response to low level offences. It recommended reducing the number of formal out of Court disposal options to two: Diversionary and Community Cautions, with discretion to use Community Resolution retained. The Home Office stated that the proposals were '*published under the 2019 to 2022 Johnson Conservative government*' and had not been progressed at the time of writing.
- 1.8 Several forces had published information online about out of Court measures including Community Resolution.<sup>9</sup> Some referenced programmes available through partnership organisations as part of the resolution such as drug and alcohol education and victim awareness courses, which may have been available depending on the nature and level of the offending.<sup>10</sup> Lancashire Constabulary stated that Community Resolutions could have '*several interventions attached (Restorative Justice, Words of Advice, Diversion) to change offending and/or achieve better outcomes for victims*'.<sup>11</sup>

7 National Police Chief's Guidance on Community Resolutions, 2022 available at <https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/criminal-justice/2023/npcc-community-resolution-guidance-2022-v.1.1.pdf>

8 Home Office Policy on the Proposed Legislative Reform of the Out of Court Disposals Framework, 2 August 2023 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-equality-statements/reforms-to-the-adult-out-of-court-disposals-framework-in-the-police-crime-sentencing-courts-bill-equalities-impact-assessment>

9 For example West Yorkshire Police available at <https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/ask-the-police/question/Q760>; Lancashire Constabulary available at <https://www.lancashire.police.uk/about-us/our-commitment/community-resolution/>.

10 Avon and Somerset Police, *Out of Court Resolutions* available at <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/victims-witnesses-and-offenders/out-of-court-resolutions/>.

11 As above, fn 9.

## RELEVANT INSPECTIONS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

- 1.9 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in England and Wales (HMICFRS) carried out an Inspection of the service provided to victims of crime by British Transport Police in 2022.<sup>12</sup> Having identified inconsistent consultation with victims before Community Resolution and little evidence that victims views were logged, they made a recommendation that Police in England and Wales consult victims prior to the administration of Community Resolution and that an auditable record of this interaction was maintained.
- 1.10 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in England and Wales (HMI Probation) in its Annual Report: inspection of youth offending services 2018-19 had highlighted that *'the lack of national guidance on how to work with children and young people 'out of court' resulted in an inconsistent approach across the country.'*<sup>13</sup> HMI Probation recommended collecting data centrally, having a national evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of out of Court disposals, with the Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board setting out national guidance on related work. Its 2022 Annual Report<sup>14</sup> explained that reoffending data and first-time entrant rates for children counted only those dealt with by the Courts or formal police outcomes and excluded Community Resolution. The then Chief Inspector cautioned that *'it remains the case that what is now the predominant way of dealing with children who have committed an offence remains uncounted and unevaluated.'*
- 1.11 Research commissioned by HMI Probation on the use of Community Resolution with children concluded that participants had been mostly positive about the disposal and the aim of diverting children away from the formal system.<sup>15</sup> However, the process was complex with barriers related to initial decision-making processes including ensuring consistent application by frontline Police Officers. It noted gaps in inter-agency co-ordination with some children not referred to the local Youth Offending Team (YOT) for delivery. It recommended that, *'YOTs should be informed of all [Community Resolutions] and be involved in the process, with police and relevant agencies, at the earliest possible point. Although YOT referral for intervention is not always necessary, they should be aware of every [Community Resolution] issued by the police to ensure that any risk and safeguarding issues are identified as early as possible.'*

12 HMICFRS, *Inspection of the service provided to victims of crime by British Transport Police, May 2022*, available at <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/inspection-of-the-service-provided-to-victims-of-crime-by-british-transport-police/>.

13 HMI Probation Annual Report: *inspection of youth offending services, 2018-19* available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/10/Youth-annual-report-inspection-of-youth-offending-services-2018-2019.pdf>.

14 HMI Probation Annual Report: *inspection of youth offending services, 2022* available at <https://www.jucommunitsticesinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/06/Youth-annual-report-2022-v1.0.pdf>.

15 HMI Probation, *The implementation and delivery of community resolutions: the role of youth offending services, Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/01, March 2023* available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/03/The-implementation-and-delivery-of-community-resolutions-the-role-of-youth-offending-services-1.pdf>.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE INSPECTION (CJI) INSPECTIONS

- 1.12 In January 2015 CJI, in its inspection of the police use of discretion<sup>16</sup>, noted that 'discretionary disposals,' rebranded as CRNs in June 2016, represented the main growth in alternatives to prosecution. Use of discretionary disposals had been higher than the PSNI originally envisaged with the result that governance and quality assurance needed strengthened. A key strategic recommendation called for review of the governance arrangements for all non-Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) disposals to be completed by the PSNI together with the PPS. Operational recommendations were made relating to consultation with PSNI Youth Diversion Officers (YDOs), recording of decision-making processes, improved equity monitoring, guidance and continued dip sampling.
- 1.13 A CJI Follow-Up Review in 2021 found that the main strategic recommendation had been partially achieved.<sup>17</sup> It was not fully achieved because quality assurance methods required further development, as well as performance management information, particularly the availability of reoffending data which had been limited. Six of eight operational recommendations were achieved. One recommendation, focused on the development of an electronic system for alternative disposals, was not achieved and there had been partial achievement of a recommendation for enhanced equality monitoring.
- 1.14 The Youth Justice Agency's (YJA's) involvement in the delivery of CRN programmes with children was considered in CJI's inspection of Youth Interventions.<sup>18</sup> While feedback from children and families about the support provided had been positive, better monitoring to understand patterns in CRN use and levels of work and interventions required was needed. A recommendation was made and accepted for the YJA, the PSNI and the PPS to agree an action plan to evaluate the approach to CRNs for children. This was ongoing at the time of this inspection.

16 CJI, *Police use of discretion incorporating Penalty Notices, January 2015* available at

<https://www.cjini.org/reports/police-use-of-discretion-incorporating-penalty-notices/>

17 CJI, *Police Use of Discretion Incorporating Penalty Notices – A Follow-Up Review 18 February 2021* available at

<https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-follow-up-review-of-police-use-of-discretion-incorporating-penalty-notices/>

18 CJI, *Youth Interventions: An inspection of the Youth Justice Agency's Community Interventions, 5 September 2024* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/youth-interventions-an-inspection-of-the-youth-justice-agencys-community-interventions/>

## **THIS INSPECTION**

---

1.15 This inspection focused on the PSNI's use of CRNs. The main organisation inspected was the PSNI, however, other agencies were included in respect of their engagement and co-operation with the PSNI, mainly the PPS and the YJA. The Department of Justice (DoJ) was consulted in relation to its governance role through the Out of Court Disposals Working Group, a cross-criminal justice system group, which was one of five priority projects agreed by and reporting to the Criminal Justice Board. Stakeholder organisations met with Inspectors to help inform the inspection and to discuss learning from victims' experiences and from their work supporting children and adults who had offended. Fieldwork comprising focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and documentary analysis was completed with the PSNI and its staff during November and December 2024 and a sample of CRN files issued during a one-month period in 2024 were reviewed. The inspection Methodology is outlined in Appendix 4.

## CHAPTER 2: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

### SYSTEM-WIDE STRATEGY

- 2.1 There was no single criminal justice system strategy governing the use of out of Court disposals. Expansion and use were related to the wider Programme for Government 2024-27 priority for 'Safer Communities.' Driving forward a 'Speeding Up Justice Programme' to progress the most serious cases more quickly and remove demand from the Court system was part of its focus.<sup>19</sup> Published after the fieldwork for this inspection, it included a commitment to 'explore options for expanding Out of Court Disposals including Community Resolution Notices to speed up the time taken to dispose of those cases, and help reduce pressure on the Courts and other justice agencies.' As the expansion of out of Court disposals was already in development before this, the Programme for Government provided an important opportunity to confirm strategic direction and intent. At the time of writing, out of Court disposals had been included as one of the successful Northern Ireland Executive Transformation Fund projects, which was promising and made the need for strategic drive even more pressing.<sup>20</sup>
- 2.2 System-wide governance for out of Court disposals, including CRNs, had already existed within the Criminal Justice Board's 'Speeding Up Justice Programme,' which was the most recent strategic approach to tackling avoidable delay within the criminal justice system.<sup>21</sup> CJI had recognised the significance of the Criminal Justice Board's role in this respect, as it '...sought to develop strategic criminal justice objectives and deliver effectiveness across the criminal justice system through five key priority projects in the Speeding Up Justice programme.'<sup>22</sup> The five workstreams were:
- Early Engagement;
  - Digital;
  - Magistrates' Court Remit;
  - Committal Reform; and
  - Out of Court Disposals.

19 Northern Ireland Executive, *Programme for Government 2024-2027: Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most*. available at <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most-documents>.

20 DoJ News, *Transformation projects will deliver tangible benefits for justice* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/transformation-projects-will-deliver-tangible-benefits-justice>.

21 It had been almost 20 years since CJI highlighted the importance of a joined-up strategic approach to this issue. *CJI, Avoidable Delay: A thematic inspection of delay in the processing of criminal cases in Northern Ireland, May 2006* available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/ed9d97d7-a15f-4fa5-90d1-3e3867124c21/Avoidable-Delay-May-2006.aspx>.

22 CJI, *Transforming the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland: A Strategic Overview, November 2024*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/transforming-the-criminal-justice-system-in-northern-ireland/>.

- 2.3 Ensuring cases were dealt with at the appropriate level including outside of a formal Court process was tasked to the Out of Court Disposals Working Group (the Working Group). The Terms of Reference for the Group were agreed in April 2024 and comprised several 'priority work areas', one of which was to review arrangements for police discretionary disposals with a view to expansion. This had included CRNs, PNDs and Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). The Group was chaired by the PSNI and membership included the PPS, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service and the DoJ. In response to recommendations within the CJI Youth Interventions Inspection Report<sup>23</sup>, membership had also recently included the YJA, which had a key role in the delivery of CRN programmes for children.
- 2.4 The Working Groups' initial focus in respect of out of Court police disposals had been the expansion and use of CRNs. PNDs had featured less because legislative authority was required before PNDs could be expanded. The Group intended to meet monthly and although there had been a gap post summer, meetings had resumed by the end of November 2024. They were generally well attended. Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives Restorative Justice had been invited to provide input, which showed enquiry by members around the piloting of a Community Based Restorative Justice (CBRJ) CRN.
- 2.5 The PSNI provided monthly update reports to the Working Group on the numbers of CRNs issued and outcomes from PSNI compliance monitoring. There was scope to drive learning and ensure responsibility was shared across the Working Group with members exercising more of a challenge function. Members demonstrated commitment to the Working Group but said it was still developing direction and understanding its role. This needed to include a strategic steer on the aims of CRN expansion and how objectives would be measured. Strategic issues identified within the Groups' Terms of Reference included:
- enhancing the service for victims;
  - reducing demand within the PSNI and the PPS;
  - removing a significant number of low-level cases from the criminal justice system; and
  - freeing up resources to focus on more serious criminal cases.
- 2.6 CJI was not assured that performance measures existed to evidence if CRNs were addressing these issues. With a dedicated membership and the Terms of Reference agreed, it was crucial to identify targets and plan the types of longitudinal data needed. This would help drive evaluation and assess if intended goals were achieved, for example, had an enhanced service to victims and reduced PSNI and PPS demand been achieved (see Strategic Recommendation 2).

23 CJI, *Youth Interventions: An inspection of the Youth Justice Agency's Community Interventions*, 5 September 2024 available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/youth-interventions-an-inspection-of-the-youth-justice-agencys-community-interventions/>

2.7 Many other strategies and frameworks had an important association with plans for expanding out of Court disposals. In the absence of a strategy governing the use of out of Court disposals, it was difficult for the Out of Court Disposals Working Group to demonstrate how effective links had been made. The broader commitment to focus on enhancing victims' experiences needed to influence these plans, most notably Outcome 1 of the Draft Policing Plan 2025-2030 that the 'PSNI is Victim Focused' including the following indicators:<sup>24</sup>

- effectiveness in Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls;
- effectiveness in Tackling Domestic Abuse;
- effectiveness in Tackling Child Criminal Exploitation;
- effectiveness in Tackling Hate Crime; and
- providing a High Quality Service to Victims.

2.8 The Northern Ireland Executive Strategic Framework 2024-31 *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls* required acknowledgement too. 'A justice system which has the confidence of victims, survivors, and the public in its ability to address violence against women and girls' was one of its outcomes. Despite expanded use of CRNs potentially encompassing crimes of violence against women and girls, there was no explicit connection between its priority areas for the justice system and the programme of work expanding out of Court sanctions.

2.9 Other criminal justice strategies and reviews that needed to inform the approach to revising police discretion including the use of CRNs included:

- The *Victims and Witnesses Strategy 2021-24* - the strategic aim was to support all victims and witnesses and to improve their experience of the criminal justice system;<sup>25</sup>
- The *Adult Restorative Justice Strategy for Northern Ireland 2022-2027* - included an action to 'pilot new adult restorative justice process for low level offending as part of Community Resolution Notices';<sup>26</sup>
- *Strategic Framework for Youth Justice 2022-2027* - included CRNs within its section on Earlier Stage Diversion linked to the DoJ's overall strategic approach to reducing offending.<sup>27</sup> This was monitored through a Youth Engagement Steering Group represented by many of the same organisations on the Out of Court Disposals Working Group, and it was reported each would share any strategic issues related to CRNs;

24 Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, *Policing Plan Consultation 2025-2030* available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2024-09/draft-policing-plan-2025-2030-consultation-document.pdf>.

25 DoJ, *Victim and Witness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2021-24* available at [https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim%20and%20witness%20strategy%202021-2024\\_0.pdf](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim%20and%20witness%20strategy%202021-2024_0.pdf).

26 DoJ, *Adult Restorative Justice Strategy for Northern Ireland: Restoring Relationships, Redressing Harm 2022-2027*, 15 March 2022 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/adult%20rj%20strategy-31.pdf>.

27 DoJ, *Strategic Framework for Youth Justice 2022-2027*, March 2022 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/strategic%20framework%20for%20youth%20justice%20-%202022%20-%202027.PDF>.

- *The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031* - it had not referred to out of Court disposals, but domestic abuse related crimes were on the authorised list for CRNs in certain circumstances. Those responsible therefore needed to demonstrate how these CRNs were meeting the aims of this Strategy particularly Pillar 5 '*Ensuring justice responses are effective, supporting victims and holding individuals who are abusive to account, at the earliest opportunity*' with relevant key priority areas relating to ensuring victims were confident in the justice system and individuals held to account for and supported to change abusive behaviour;<sup>28</sup> and
- *Hate Crime Legislation in Northern Ireland: Independent Review* - recommended that '*diversion from prosecution is an appropriate method of dealing with low level hate crimes. The model as per the practice in Scotland appears to offer an efficient and practical template.*'<sup>29</sup> It was not clear if a police disposal was envisioned, as the Scottish model cited had referred to a prosecutor decision and it was important for the Out of Court Disposals Working Group keep pace with any developments.

2.10 Having examined the approach to avoidable delay in the criminal justice system, the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee noted in 2021 that '*[the] development of a strategic vision, including defining what success looks like, is an important part of change management. It also serves in communicating to stakeholders and to the public a clear idea of what they should expect from the justice system and in providing a means to assess its performance against the standards set.*'<sup>30</sup>

2.11 A strategic framework for out of Court disposals including CRNs, identifying targets and the suite of performance measures, was required to manage direction and enhance transparency in respect of the outcomes that expansion was intended to achieve. This was also needed to facilitate a wider conversation with stakeholders and the public about the aims of expanding out of Court disposals, the drive to reduce demand and how this aligned with priorities to enhance services for victims including tackling hate crime and ending violence against women and girls (see Strategic Recommendation 2).

28 DoJ and DoH, *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031*, September 2024 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/dsa-strategy-09-24.pdf>

29 *Hate Crime Legislation in Northern Ireland: Independent Review*, (undated) available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/hate-crime-review.pdf>

30 Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee, *Report on Speeding Up the Justice System*, available at <https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2017-2022/public-accounts-committee/reports/report-on-speeding-up-the-justice-system/>

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE ORGANISATIONS

- 2.12 *'Speeding Up Justice'* was included in the 2023-24 Departmental Business Plan under the DoJ's strategic theme to *'Deliver an Effective Justice System'*.<sup>31</sup> This included plans to support continued modernisation and transformation of the Civil and Criminal Justice Systems with an action to lead on a *'Speeding Up Justice'* programme. A commitment to provide leadership and support for initiatives targeted at reducing avoidable delay through a multifaceted work programme was noted. According to the Business Plan this would be achieved through performance reporting, working in partnership, legislation, research and analysis, and improvement projects. The target date of March 2024 was marked as achieved in the DoJ Annual Report 2023-24 although detail on outcomes was limited.
- 2.13 The DoJ draft Business Plan 2024-25 continued a focus on *'Speeding Up Justice'* with a work programme to drive changes that included out of Court disposals. Under the strategic theme to Challenge Offending Behaviours and Support Rehabilitation continued implementation of the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy was included. This strategy referenced the launch of a restorative CRN pilot by April 2024, which the PSNI and CBRJ organisations had commenced. Under *'embed a strategic approach to Earlier Stage Diversion'* the DoJ cited an intention to work with the PSNI to further expand, within available resources, the use of CRNs where appropriate.
- 2.14 The PSNI had not included CRNs within an overall strategic document. However, Operational Guidance for the Use of CRNs<sup>32</sup> stated that Community Resolution sought to deliver the following objectives:
- *to improve the involvement and quality of service provided to victims by taking account of their views where reasonable and proportionate in the resolution;*
  - *to increase victim satisfaction in policing and criminal justice by providing a comparatively prompt and tailored resolution;*
  - *to provide a proportionate justice disposal for suspects with little or no previous offending history, to reduce the impact on their lives compared to other non-court disposals and encourages them to change their behaviour and not re-offend; and*
  - *to provide Officers with a proportionate disposal for offences that are comparatively less serious.*

31 DoJ, *Business Plan 2023-24, Year Two of DoJ Corporate Plan 2022-25* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Department%20of%20Justice%20Business%20Plan%202023-24.pdf>

32 PSNI Operational Guidance for the Use of Community Resolution Notices, internal document provided to CJI as part of this inspection.

- 2.15 'Proportionate processes' was a theme within the 'PPS 2030'.<sup>33</sup> The document had set out a strategic vision for a more modern, more efficient Public Prosecution Service and within the theme of 'proportionate processes' had noted '*[W]e will work with partners to implement more proportionate ways to deal with cases to allow us to optimise our prosecutorial resources. This will include reviewing the arrangements for "no prosecution" cases and the use of alternatives to prosecution ([example] Fixed Penalties, Community Resolution, prosecutorial fines etc) to ensure that lower level, less complex cases are dealt with promptly.*'
- 2.16 The PPS Annual Business Plan 2024-25 highlighted its 'Working Together Programme', a joint programme with the PSNI to improve case progression and the quality of case files.<sup>34</sup> It had three workstreams: file quality and disclosure, modernisation and transformation and out of Court disposals. The last was '*...to assess and implement measures to reduce demand within both organisations, the introduction of new (non-court) disposal types and the wider use of existing police discretionary disposals. The workstream is jointly led by the PPS's Head of Policy and Information and the Head of PSNI's Criminal Justice Branch.*' There was no key performance measure for this workstream although it had become linked to the Criminal Justice Board's Out of Court Disposals Working Group. It was noted that, given the overlap with the Criminal Justice Board work programme, the Working Group also served as the subgroup for the Out of Court Disposals strand of the PPS and the PSNI Working Together Programme.
- 2.17 An activity under further embedding a strategic approach to Earlier Stage Diversion that included '*working with the PSNI to further expand, within available resources, the use of Community Resolution Notices where appropriate*' was included in the YJA Business Plan 2024-25.<sup>35</sup> Part of its work included plans to evaluate, with the PSNI and the PPS, the use of CRNs with children. This had arisen from a recommendation in the CJI Youth Interventions Inspection Report to better understand the use of CRNs with children and the quality of CRN programmes.<sup>36</sup>
- 2.18 The Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2020-2025 indicator 2.4: '*delivery of effective outcomes*' measured levels of crime outcomes, with a focus on domestic abuse, to identify areas of concern noting:<sup>37</sup>

33 PPS 2030: A strategic vision for the future of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, internal PPS document (hard copy)

34 PPS, Annual Business Plan 2024-25, June 2024 available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2024-07/PPS%20Annual%20Business%20Plan%202024-25%20%28002%29.pdf>

35 YJA, Youth Justice Agency Business Plan 2024-2025 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/yja-business-plan-24-25.PDF>

36 CJI, Youth Interventions: An inspection of the Youth Justice Agency's Community Interventions, September 2024 available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/youth-interventions-an-inspection-of-the-youth-justice-agencys-community-interventions/>

37 Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2020-2025 & Annual Performance Plan 2024-25, 31 March 2024 available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2024-03/Annual%20Performance%20Plan%202024-25%20-%20Update%20March24%20-%20Tagged.pdf>

*'[...] In order to ensure the PSNI is providing a victim focused service it is important to understand what victims want as a result of reporting the crime, for example an effective crime outcome for a victim may not necessarily be a custodial sentence, it could be a restorative justice approach such as a caution or penalty notice.'*

Although CRNs had not been monitored specifically, out of Court disposals had consisted mostly of Community Resolutions.<sup>38</sup> PSNI updates had been scrutinised by the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) Performance Committee and outcomes included within its annual assessments (see further in Chapter 4).

- 2.19 Use of CRNs had not featured explicitly within Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) Local Policing Plans. However, the PSNI said that some individual policing areas may have been reporting use of CRNs to its local PCSP. There was potential for the PSNI to consider in liaison with local PCSPs whether a consistent mechanism for updating on local CRN trends, usage and programme availability would have been beneficial.

## PSNI GOVERNANCE

### PSNI leadership and accountability

- 2.20 The PSNI reported that use of CRNs was monitored as part of its internal governance structures. This included locally by Districts through weekly performance and planning (Pacesetter) meetings and the monthly Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group at which District performance was considered. CRN use was also monitored through Criminal Justice Branch Pacesetter meetings and the PSNI Justice Department Quarterly performance Review chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable for Justice. There was also a Service Accountability Panel, which considered performance more generally. It was indicated that CRN performance would eventually be monitored by the Local Policing Performance Meeting but was not appearing explicitly as an agenda item at the time of fieldwork. The Local Policing Performance Meeting involved Assistant Chief Constables, District Commanders, Area Co-ordinators, and Performance Chief Inspectors. While this was positive, evidence of this working in practice for oversight of CRNs was needed and it was not available to CJI at the time of fieldwork.
- 2.21 The PSNI 'PULSE' system was being developed to capture District performance data that included use of CRNs incorporating some equality data. This was intended to provide more effective reporting for District Commanders and inform oversight by governance groups including the Local Policing Performance Meeting.

<sup>38</sup> See PSNI, *Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015-16 to 2023-24* available at <https://www.psni.police.uk/system/files/2024-11/1192449790/Police%20Crime%20Outcomes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202015-16%20to%202023-24.pdf>.

Not having been completed, CJI was unable to comment on effectiveness but was encouraged by the plans. A mock screen with CRN performance was demonstrated to Inspectors. A key issue would be how the PSNI used 'PULSE' data to appraise CRN quality and risks organisationally and at District level. The PSNI had been reviewing its approach to equality monitoring across the PSNI through its Police Powers Development Group, although had not focused on CRNs. There was no time bound plan to enhance equity monitoring of CRN use.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within three months of report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should revise its governance arrangements to ensure regular strategic accountability for the use of out of Court disposals including Community Resolution Notices at District level and Assistant Chief Constable level, and that accountability mechanisms include regular reporting and analysis of equality data to monitor appropriateness and equity of use.

### Expansion of Community Resolutions: Operational Guidance

- 2.22 In 2022 and prior to the formation of the Out of Court Disposals Working Group, the PSNI had tasked its Criminal Justice Branch to explore expansion of offences suitable for CRN. Reducing demand for frontline Officers and the number of case files with a 'no prosecution' recommendation submitted by the PSNI to the PPS had been the overall objective.<sup>39</sup> However, the proposal also acknowledged that CRNs were a method to provide a quicker resolution and more tailored outcomes for victims for relatively minor offences. Expanded use was estimated to reduce the number of 'no prosecution' files or diversionary files for offences that were not already included on the authorised list.
- 2.23 It was crucial to note the inappropriateness of Community Resolution where there was no reasonable prospect of conviction. The PSNI Guidance had stated that '*Community resolution is not an alternative to the effective investigation of an alleged offence. Regardless of the anticipated outcome, the Investigating Officer must have the reasonable belief that the suspect has committed the offence(s) and be able to prove and evidence the offence(s) if required.*'
- 2.24 The PSNI Criminal Justice Branch led a detailed programme of research and development to explore potential expansion. A variety of evidence including crime statistics, internal PSNI data, and PPS management information was analysed. Learning from internal compliance monitoring and joint quality assurance of CRNs by the PSNI and the PPS had also been used. This was supplemented by internal consultation with the PSNI drugs experts, the PSNI hate crime leads, and Public Protection Branch leads on domestic abuse.

<sup>39</sup> Internal PSNI Update Proposal Paper, 18 November 2022, (copy provided to CJI).

2.25 Initial proposals for expansion were submitted to the PPS along with the PSNI's Justice Department Management in November 2022. Further detail was added, and the Criminal Justice Board's Out of Court Disposals Working Group reviewed a final summary dated May 2024. With all proposed offences considered, approximately 1,600 additional files submitted to the PPS each year were estimated as potentially suitable for CRN.

2.26 The changes contained within the Guidance could be summarised as follows:

- **Recipient Declaration:** this was updated to enable the PSNI to rescind a CRN and submit a file to the PPS in exceptional circumstances, if necessary, after the resolution has been completed.
- **Supervisor authority:** all offences eligible for a CRN required supervisory authority prior to issue.
- **Additional offences:** added to the authorised list for a CRN including:
  - **Low level domestic abuse offences** between intimate or previously intimate partners, with additional strict criteria and Inspector authority required.
  - **Low level hate crime offences** with additional strict criteria and Inspector authority required.
  - **Drugs categories** and types along with volume and quantity increased.
  - **Inchoate offences** (aiding, abetting, threats to commit etc.) related to the offences already on the authorised CRN list.
- **Offences removed:** indecent exposure was removed from the authorised offence list as not suitable for a CRN; and the offence of indecent behaviour was limited to street urination, 'mooning' and 'streaking.'

### Safeguards for CRN use

2.27 Safeguards within the Guidance included 10 mandatory eligibility points. While more detail required to satisfy each point was included within the Guidance, a checklist was included on the CRN booklet used by Officers, within a PSNI *'Practical Peeler'*,<sup>40</sup> and on a template for the Officer Enquiry Log (OEL) on the NICHE records management system.

40 The Practical Peeler was a summary briefing developed by the PSNI for Police Officers on the use of Community Resolution Notices.

## Extract from PSNI Practice Peeler:

All 10 eligibility points **must** be met to issue a CRN. If any are missing, an alternative disposal should be considered.

1. There is sufficient evidence to prove offence(s).
2. The Recipient is 10 years of age or older.
3. The Recipient made a clear and reliable admission.
4. The Recipient is coherent and fully able to understand.
5. The Recipient's previous offending history is eligible.

They will be **unsuitable** if they have the following for same/similar offence(s):

- **CRN or PND in the last 12 months;**
- **Conviction/Caution/Informed Warning/Youth Conference in the last 2 years;**
- **Pending occurrences/case files, for the same or similar offences;**
- **Breach of NMO [Non-Molestation Order]<sup>41</sup> for relevant offence;**
- **On licence, on Police or Court bail, on Probation or subject of an ASBO [Anti-Social Behaviour Order]<sup>42</sup> or PPANI [Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland]<sup>43</sup> offender for **ANY OFFENCE**.**

6. The offence(s) is on the authorised CRN offence list.
7. The YDO has given approval where the Recipient is under 18 (CRN and Resolution Agreement **MUST** both be approved by YDO prior to issue).
8. The risks, vulnerabilities and victim/community views or impacts have been considered.
9. The Recipient has shown remorse.
10. Supervisor authority given for the CRN to be issued (Must have Supervisor authority and rationale on the OEL for **ALL OFFENCES**)

Although not summarised on the checklist, the Guidance stated that off duty Police Officers and staff who committed a criminal offence could qualify for a CRN provided abuse of their position as a PSNI Officer or staff member had not been involved, with a requirement to inform the PSNI Professional Standards Department that a CRN had been issued.

41 A Non-Molestation Order was a Civil Order granted by a court to protect a victim of domestic violence or relevant child. Contravention without reasonable excuse is a criminal offence (Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, as amended).

42 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were Civil Orders granted by a court to prohibit a person from specified behaviours. Breach without reasonable excuse is a criminal offence (The Anti-Social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004).

43 PPANI was a multi-agency system of risk assessment and management for sexual and violent offenders operated by the PSNI, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and Social Services (see PPANI website available at <https://www.publicprotectionni.com/>).

2.28 Some Officers who met with CJI considered that the need for supervisor authority in all cases reduced Officer discretion. The PSNI Criminal Justice Branch determined through learning from quality assurance that it was required to enhance consistency in CRNs use. CJI agreed particularly considering the offence expansion and having emphasised the need for more robust supervision where discretion was used.<sup>44</sup> Supervisors had a specific NICHE template to include on the OEL when authorising a CRN. As noted further in considering the delivery of CRNs, the use of this template required emphasis and ongoing monitoring.

### Safeguards for cases with aggravating factors

2.29 Offences involving vulnerable or repeat victims, risks for community confidence, more than one crime, or non-intimate partner domestic abuse were deemed 'aggravating factors' that required additional Sergeant rationale. While understanding the reasoning for CRNs more generally, these were among areas of concern that stakeholders highlighted to CJI about the use of police disposals. In practice, it was important that the PSNI evidenced how 'additional rationale' as opposed to Inspector authority was an appropriate safeguard considering that rationale was required in all cases anyway. The NPCC guidance on use of Community Resolution required Inspector authorisation in non-intimate domestic abuse cases and in exceptional circumstances only.<sup>45</sup>

### Extract from PSNI Practical Peeler:

#### AGGRAVATING FACTORS: REQUIRING ADDITIONAL **SUPERVISOR/SERGEANT** AUTHORITY AND RATIONALE

*All authorised offences require a minimum of Sergeant's authority to issue a CRN but when any of the following aggravating factors are identified, ADDITIONAL rationale from a Sergeant is required:*

- *It involves a vulnerable or repeat victim (same offender) or risks community confidence.*
- *It involves more than one offence, provided:*
  1. *All are part of a single 'incident' and*
  2. *All offence/s can be dealt with by CRN (no mix and match).*
- *The offence has a **domestic motivation***

*A CRN **can** be issued where an Offence has a domestic motivation provided:*

  1. *The parties are not and never have been in an intimate relationship;*
  2. *The PPN [Public Protection Notice]<sup>46</sup> risk assessment is not high; and*
  3. *There are no child protection issues.*

44 CJI, *Police use of Discretionary Disposals Incorporating Penalty Notices*, January 2015 available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/police-use-of-discretion-incorporating-penalty-notices/>

45 NPCC, *Community Resolutions (CR) Guidance 2022* available at <https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/criminal-justice/2023/npcc-community-resolution-guidance-2022-v.1.1.pdf>

46 A PPN is completed by PSNI Officers attending domestic abuse incidents to record the risk assessment and direct referrals to the relevant Health and Social Care Trust Social Services.

2.30 The Guidance stated that 'additional rationale to address the aggravating factor/ issue identified should be documented on the OEL to show the CRN is suitable and is the most appropriate disposal for the victim and the suspect.' While 'aggravated' circumstances included a repeat victim of the same offender, the response where a person had experienced repeat victimisation by different offenders was not covered. This warranted careful scrutiny particularly where it formed part of a pattern experienced by the victim and was for the PSNI to examine as the Guidance was monitored. As reflected in Chapter 3, the offence of harassment was also a potential concern due to the repetitive nature of the behaviour.

### Hate related offences

2.31 The inclusion of hate crime is discussed more in Chapter 3. The Guidance noted that such offences were aggravated. The updated proposal for CRN expansion in May 2023 stated that the approach of permitting Community Resolution where the hate element was based only on victims' perception and no evidence of actual hostility was restrictive. It proposed including cases in which there was evidence of aggravation with this expansion intended to offer a sanction outcome in cases where this had not been achievable due to victim withdrawal or not wishing to provide a statement. The Guidance required additional criteria with Inspector authority and rationale:

#### Extract from PSNI Practical Peeler:

OFFENCES REQUIRING **INSPECTOR** AUTHORITY AND RATIONALE:

*Additional authority and rationale is required from a rank not below Inspector for [...] hate motivated offences.  
[...]*

**HATE MOTIVATED OFFENCE(S)** - Further criteria must be met:

1. VRAM [Vulnerability Risk Assessment Matrix]<sup>47</sup> is assessed as LOW
2. Victim's views are taken into consideration when agreeing a tailored and meaningful resolution from the suspect.\*
3. Community Impact is taken into consideration as part of the Hate assessment and how the CRN may impact on the wider community.

*\*(The victim cannot veto the decision on a CRN but they should be at the forefront of how the resolution would affect them as the victim).*

47 A VRAM is used to '...fully assess and document the risk and impact of hate and signal crime/incident on the victim and the wider community and will prompt and provide an audit of the actions taken by the PSNI personnel to mitigate further victimisation', see PSNI Service Instruction SI2117 Hate Crime available at [Hate Crime 25 April 2023.pdf](#).

2.32 Stakeholders were open to the use of a CRN as a potentially timelier resolution but had reservations. This included proportionality, avoiding use in relation to repeat victims, ensuring the nature of a CRN was properly explained, understanding that intimidation or fear may have influenced the victim's response, guaranteeing access to victim support and ensuring that any escalation in hate would be monitored. In this respect, it was important that any hate element was recorded even if a police disposal had been issued.

### **Intimate or former intimate partner domestic abuse related offences**

2.33 While the NPCC guidance on the use of Community Resolution stated it may be used for non-intimate domestic abuse in exceptional circumstances with Inspector authority, use for intimate partner domestic abuse was excluded.<sup>48</sup> The PSNI distinguished its approach on the basis that Community Resolution in England required only 'acceptance of responsibility'. Among relevant factors was that the suspect accepted their actions contributed to the offence. In contrast, the PSNI Guidance required a clear and reliable admission of guilt with 'acceptance of actions' not sufficient.

2.34 In examining inclusion of intimate and former intimate partners, the PSNI proposals noted that the number of domestic abuse related files sent to the PPS for both prosecution and no prosecution 'was a significant proportion and dominant volume of work for frontline [Officers]'. The expansion was envisioned to cover a minor offence resulting in either a 'prosecution' or 'no prosecution file' when statements had not been provided but verbal complaints and admissions were made. It aimed to facilitate better evidence led decisions and offer an additional disposal provided all criteria were met. Such cases were highlighted as aggravated with Inspector authority and additional criteria:

48 NPCC, *Community Resolutions (CR) Guidance 2022* available at <https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/criminal-justice/2023/npcc-community-resolution-guidance-2022-v.1.1.pdf>

## Extract from PSNI Practical Peeler

### OFFENCES REQUIRING **INSPECTOR** AUTHORITY AND RATIONALE:

Additional authority and rationale is required from a rank not below Inspector for domestic motivated offences and hate motivated offences.

**DOMESTIC MOTIVATED OFFENCE(S) - If the suspect is in an intimate partnership or previously has been in an intimate partnership with the victim** – further criteria must be met [in addition to the criteria for all offences and domestic offences between non-intimate partners noted above]:

1. There must be no previous domestic history between **any parties in the last 3 years.**
2. No NMO or Orders are in place on the Suspect against the victim or **ANY** other person.
3. The injuries to the victim are minor or low level.
4. The parties do not live together.
5. Victim's view are taken into consideration when agreeing a tailored and meaningful resolution from the suspect.\*

\*(The victim cannot veto the decision on a CRN but they should be at the forefront of how the resolution would affect them as the victim).

2.35 The Guidance stated, 'The reason for this increased level of authorisation for this type of disposal is due to the potential risks in relation to intimate or previously intimate relationships.' However, it had not stated explicitly that consideration of a CRN in this type of case would be rare. The CJI Review of the Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the 2021 Act) recommended that the PPS policy and guidance clarify and direct the use of cautions in domestic abuse cases in rare circumstances only, with a requirement for a detailed record of reasoning and rationale if they are used.<sup>49</sup> Cautions received a higher level of scrutiny than CRNs being a formal disposal reviewed by the PPS. At the time of fieldwork for this inspection, CJI was undertaking a Year Two Review to assess progress against its recommendations for implementing the 2021 Act including limiting the use of Cautions in domestic abuse related cases (this Review Report was published in April 2025 and is available on the CJI website).

2.36 There was concern about the use of CRNs for domestic abuse related offences including the potential for conflict with recent messaging about the gravity of coercive control. With no publicly available information, most stakeholders

49 CJI, Review of the Effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceeding Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, 17 April 2024 available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/review-of-the-effectiveness-of-the-domestic-abuse-and-civil-proceedings-act-northern-ireland-2021/>

who met with CJJ were unaware of the Guidance's detail and had been keen to understand it. While open to a circumstance within family relationships, for example, between siblings, if underlying risks were appropriately assessed there was considerable doubt about the appropriateness of CRNs to address inter relationship domestic abuse.

- 2.37 There was also concern in case patterns of behaviour were missed. Evidence showed that police contact was rarely the first incident of domestic abuse. The Chief Constable's Stakeholder Update January 2025 reported that victims '*...may have endured up to 35 incidents of abuse before reporting.*'<sup>50</sup> More information about reoffending outcomes would have been welcomed, as well as any impacts on 'Claire's Law' (the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme) and on future Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders. The Criminal Justice Branch proposals for expansion had indicated it would monitor impact on the latter and it was important to plan for this. Monitoring impact on the '*Power to Tell Pathway*' in the Domestic Abuse and Violence Disclosure Scheme had not featured in routine monitoring by the PSNI or the Out of Court Disposals Working Groups' scrutiny and it was important this was included.<sup>51</sup>

### Impact on particular groups of people

- 2.38 The expanded Guidance had been screened by the PSNI for impact on Section 75 groups of people.<sup>52</sup> This concluded that no adverse impacts were anticipated and a full Equality Impact Assessment was not required. However, CRN equality data was limited and was not being gathered across all Section 75 groups, for example, sexual orientation and disability.
- 2.39 The equality screening warranted ongoing review as the Guidance embedded particularly as the expansion included additional personal offences. Research on use of out of Court resolution (restorative justice and community resolution) for domestic abuse across the United Kingdom found that in cases of intimate partner abuse '*there was an over-representation of same-sex cases and of cases involving male victims and female offenders in terms of how frequently out of court resolutions were used.*'<sup>53</sup> Data from Northern Ireland had been included in the research and while different contexts and criteria for Community Resolutions existed, it showed the importance of equity monitoring to detect any disparities in use (see Strategic Recommendation 1).

50 PSNI, Chief Constable's update to stakeholders (unpublished) January 2025.

51 PSNI Service Instruction SI1217 Domestic Abuse available at <https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2024-01/Domestic%20Abuse%20%2021%20January%202024.pdf>.

52 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

53 Westmarland, N., Johnson, K., and McGlynn, C. Under the Radar: The Widespread Use of 'Out of Court Resolutions' in Policing Domestic Violence and Abuse in the United Kingdom, *British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 58, Issue 1 January 2018 available at <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/58/1/1/3058237>.

## Compliance and quality assurance

- 2.40 The PSNI Criminal Justice Branch led on internal quality assurance of discretionary disposals including CRNs. CJI was satisfied that in examples viewed this had been undertaken to a level that enabled compliance testing and learning. However, strategic support was required. Expertise and knowledge came from individuals within the Criminal Justice Branch and was not strategically embedded by the PSNI as an organisation. There were limited plans or contingency arrangements in place to show that resource for monitoring matched demand, was capable of adjustment if cases increased, or could be maintained should individuals move on from this role.
- 2.41 At the time of fieldwork, the role was managed and discharged by the Criminal Justice Branch Sergeant who held other responsibilities. Internal PSNI proposals to expand the use of CRNs had stated that 100% of CRNs with a Hate element attached were sampled for compliance and 50% of all CRNs issued with a Domestic related element randomly dip sampled. Since changes to the Guidance in August 2024, CJI understood that quality assurance had concentrated on non-compliance (that is, cases out of scope) with less capacity for random dip sampling than in the past. Assistance from an Officer had been secured focusing on scrutiny of domestic abuse related offences and this had been positive. The role of quality assurance was not the same as tracking longitudinal trends and it was important to understand the planning and resource required to embed both roles.
- 2.42 The Performance Management and Quality Assurance team was responsible for quality assurance across Districts and had begun dip sampling for CRN compliance with a view to embedding this as an ongoing approach. It was proposed that responsibility for addressing non-compliance would remain with the Criminal Justice Branch. It had monitored CRNs issued out of scope, provided advice and rescinded CRNs when required. This was a sensible approach to ensure consistency. Through file review and discussions with Officers, clear advice, direction and follow-up from the Criminal Justice Branch Sergeant to Officers and Supervisors about their approach to issuing a CRN in individual cases was evident.
- 2.43 Joint Quality Assurance of CRN use had been undertaken by the PSNI and the PPS but had not occurred since April 2023. It had been paused for several reasons including resource issues across both organisations. A revised Service Level Agreement had been drafted but not agreed. The PPS input was essential to ensure independent oversight. Learning from joint quality assurance had shown the value of this. It was the reason indecent exposure was removed from the eligible CRN offence list with the PPS having advised that some cases were more than 'moonie' or 'streaking' and therefore non-complaint.
- 2.44 The 2021 CJI Follow-Up Review on the use of discretionary disposals by the PSNI had highlighted that, *'The police needed to monitor and implement joint protocol oversight arrangements for [Quality Assurance] for instances in which discretion*

*had been applied as well as those when it had not.[...] In the months following initial fieldwork the PSNI had implemented Gatekeepers to provide additional scrutiny of cases sent to the PPS for direction. Inspectors welcomed the addition to internal monitoring practice but recognised a need for ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness.'* At the time of this inspection, the PSNI indicated that Gatekeepers were not reviewing files for this purpose although queries could be raised if it appeared a lower level disposal was more appropriate.

- 2.45 It was acknowledged that assessment of all disposal options was a matter for the Investigating Officer and Supervisor, however, an indication within the file that other disposals had been considered and ruled out was not always evident. As in the Follow-Up Review, Inspectors believed this to be an area that required further scoping and development as part of quality assurance arrangements.

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within three months of report publication:

- the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should resume joint quality assurance and oversight of Community Resolution Notice use with evidence of learning; and
- the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in consultation with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, should review current quality assurance mechanisms for cases submitted to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for direction to enable effective oversight of whether all cases were being given due consideration for police disposal, and that these considerations were being recorded within the files submitted.

### Oversight by the Office of the Police Ombudsman

- 2.46 The Office of the Police Ombudsman (OPONI) investigated complaints about the conduct of Police Officers in Northern Ireland including the use of police disposals. Although it had not disaggregated data to identify trends in CRN related complaints, relevant information was provided to CJI, and recommendations to the PSNI arising from complaints related to the use of CRNs had been made. The OPONI recommendations had been related to ensuring sufficient safeguarding and supervision in the delivery of CRNs.
- 2.47 The PSNI responded to the OPONI recommendations reporting that resolutions were already in place or an alternative solution had been determined. It cited various provisions of the revised Guidance. Crucially, the PSNI committed to consider any views on the revised Guidance and review the CRN process as the Guidance embedded. Monitoring by the PSNI was needed to ensure its response achieved the level of safeguards intended, particularly where the PSNI had proposed an alternative resolution to what the OPONI recommended.

## TRAINING

- 2.48 The Criminal Justice Branch had been involved in the development of training for Student Officers and prepared a training presentation and video input for Probationary Officers. Inspectors had an opportunity to view both. Delivery emphasised the importance of assessing the wider circumstances and appropriateness of issuing a CRN, and that rationale for considering the appropriateness of Community Resolution was needed even if all the criteria was met.
- 2.49 Officers who met with Inspectors had been aware of the revised Guidance and CRN forms but most were beyond the probationary period and had therefore not received training on the revisions. The Criminal Justice Branch had received approval for CRNs to be included within the District Training Programme and had completed 'training for trainers' in early 2025 with a schedule for roll out developed. This was positive.
- 2.50 There was scope to consider training for Officers about CRN programmes where these had been available or were being piloted. While not adding to Officers' workload, some knowledge about the programme offer was important.

### Information accessibility and participatory governance

- 2.51 Presentations on the revised Guidance for the use of CRNs had been delivered by the PSNI's Criminal Justice Branch to a range of forums at which stakeholder groups were represented. This included the Offending Regional Subgroup of the Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership, the PSNI Youth Engagement Forum, and the NIPB Partnership Committee. A CRN based Restorative Justice awareness event was also held at which CBRJ organisations and Victim Support Northern Ireland were present. These inputs and the opportunity to learn about the PSNI approach to the use of CRNs were welcomed.
- 2.52 There had been a lack of publicly available and accessible information about CRNs, and stakeholder organisations were uncertain about the circumstances in which they could be used and what they entailed. More information would have been beneficial particularly for organisations supporting victims or working with people who had offended where queries about Community Resolutions could arise. Accessible information for the public was also important and had not been available at the time of fieldwork for this inspection.
- 2.53 While there had been informal discussions with some stakeholder groups about the proposals to expand CRNs, there had not been formal consultation. It was important to consult with interested groups to inform the delivery and expansion of out of Court disposals. The Criminal Justice Branch proposal paper for expanding CRNs had committed to review the Guidance 12 months after implementation.

It was considering partner input to support monitoring of CRNs and had early discussions with Victim Support Northern Ireland to explore facilitating feedback from victims where a CRN had been issued. This had not been progressed at the time of the inspection and was to be discussed further. Stakeholder input in the development of resolution programmes was also an area for examination with strategic support from the Out of Court Disposals Working Group (see also Strategic Recommendation 3).

## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2**

Within nine months of report publication, the Criminal Justice Board Out of Court Disposals Working Group should:

- develop a publicly available strategic framework setting out clear aims for the expansion of out of Court disposals including Community Resolution Notices. This should set out the performance measures required to assess if these intended aims have been achieved;
- consult with interested stakeholders on the expansion of out of Court disposals including Community Resolution Notices and the aims to be achieved; and
- ensure publicly available and accessible information about Community Resolution Notices, including the circumstances in which they can be used and the safeguards that apply.

## CHAPTER 3: DELIVERY

### DELIVERY OF CRNS

- 3.1 PSNI Constables, Sergeants and Inspectors from two PSNI District Areas participated in focus groups to discuss their experiences of issuing CRNs. The PSNI Criminal Justice Branch also provided CJI with internal management information about CRNs issued and completed, as well as outcomes from the compliance checks it had undertaken. Much of this data was prepared for the monthly Out of Court Disposals Working Group and was being developed to form part of its routine oversight as the PSNI Guidance embedded.
- 3.2 To supplement the evidence gathered for the inspection, CJI reviewed files based on a dip sample from a total of 668 CRNs issued during a one-month period in 2024 after the Guidance launched. Across these 668 CRNs issued, 72 were for children and the remainder for adults. A total of 53 were recorded as domestic abuse related and six had been flagged as hate related.
- 3.3 CJI Inspectors reviewed 29 cases. Of the files reviewed, a number had involved an incident in which more than one person received a CRN for the offending; nine had a domestic motivation and out of these, two involved intimate partners; five were hate motivated (on grounds of race in two cases, sexual orientation in two cases, and sectarian in one case); and seven cases related to child suspects.<sup>54</sup>

### COMMUNITY RESOLUTION USE BY DISTRICT

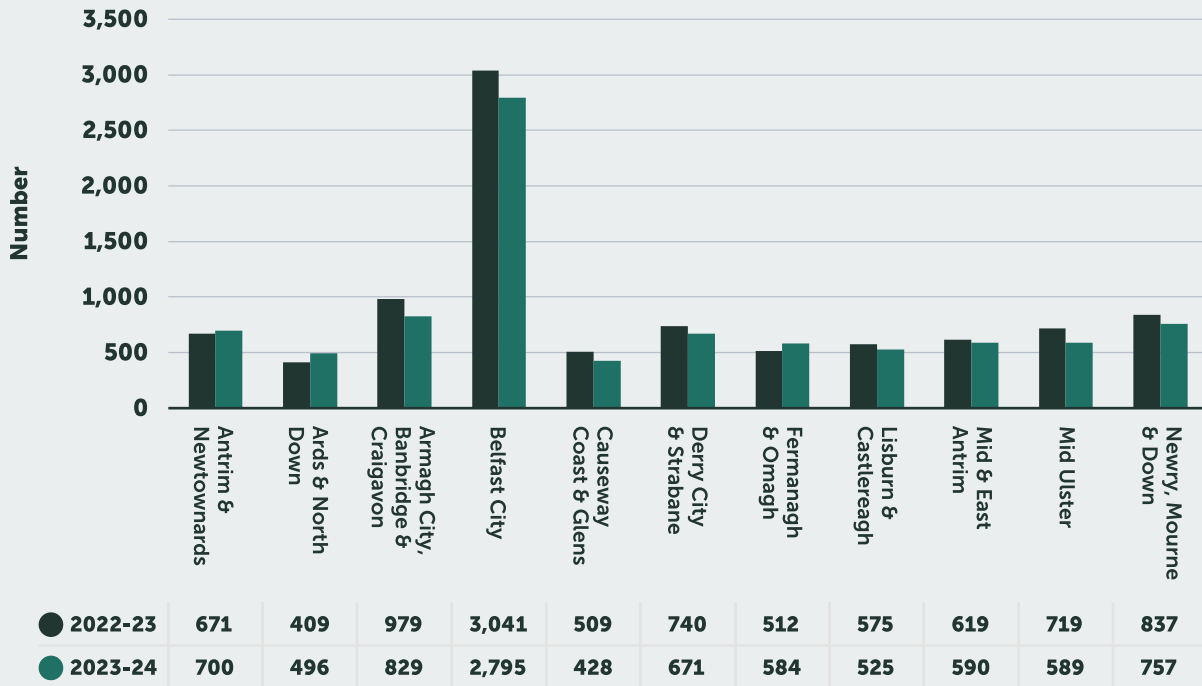
- 3.4 CJI had previously highlighted a PSNI evaluation into the use of Discretionary Disposals demonstrating significant variances in delivery by Districts.<sup>55</sup> Contributory factors identified included variance in District policy; variances in volumes of offences; the local percentage of persistent offenders; the proportion of transient populations; and inconsistency in Officer judgement. These issues were discussed by Officers who met with Inspectors for this inspection. Some noted that the opportunity to use CRNs was dictated by the nature of calls in some areas, which often encompassed more serious offences or priority offenders. However, addressing issues that required correction, such as inconsistency in use, was important and partly what the Guidance aimed to achieve.

<sup>54</sup> Note that the total does not add to 29 due to some cases featuring more than once in this description, for example, a case involving a child suspect may also have been a case involving hate crime.

<sup>55</sup> *CJI, Police use of Discretionary Disposals Incorporating Penalty Notices, January 2015* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/police-use-of-discretion-incorporating-penalty-notices/>

3.5 The number of CRNs completed by District was provided to CJl for the years 2022-23 and 2023-24 as shown in Figure 1 (in 2022-23 the District was unknown in nine cases and in 15 cases in 2023-24):<sup>56</sup>

**Figure 1: Number of CRNs completed by PSNI Districts 2022-23 and 2023-24\***



\*PSNI management information only, hard copy provided.

3.6 As expected, this showed differences in numbers issued across Districts with Belfast City having used the most, which would have at least partially reflected Belfast as the main population centre. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon District and Newry, Mourne and Down reflected high numbers of CRN use also. Notably across eight of the 11 Districts CRN use had decreased.

3.7 Available trend data related to CRNs used before the revised Guidance was introduced. There was the potential to use this as a baseline for monitoring any change in use by District because of the revised Guidance. As already discussed in Chapter 2, the Criminal Justice Branch had been developing the 'PULSE' system to capture CRN use across Districts, which was intended to assist. As part of achieving Strategic Recommendations 1 and 2, it was important to include reporting and scrutiny of CRN use by District. It was also important to understand the difference between the number of CRNs issued and completed. At the time of the inspection, the PSNI system had not recorded CRNs at the time of issue partly to allow for the recording of an alternative outcome if the resolution was not completed. However, **a mechanism to measure the completion rate of CRNs issued was an Area for Improvement.**

56 Hard copy provided to CJl by PSNI Criminal Justice Branch.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND USE OF GUIDANCE BY OFFICERS

- 3.8 Local Policing Team (LPT) and Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) Officers were positive about the availability of CRNs as a police disposal. Revisions to the Guidance were welcomed as having streamlined the criteria. The new CRN booklet was considered helpful because it stepped through a 10-point checklist. Officers would have welcomed an electronic version, which was in development with direction from the Criminal Justice Branch. When completed, CRNs would be available through an application on Officers' mobile devices. It planned to enhance ease of use and compliance by forcing Officers to complete certain 'Yes' and 'No' question sets before proceeding to the next section.
- 3.9 Challenges experienced by Officers included recipient queries about disclosure of CRNs particularly questions that had arisen about travel Visa implications. Officers explained that a CRN might be disclosed as part of an enhanced disclosure check but more detail on how to answer these types of queries would have been welcomed. The Guidance stated that, *'It is critical Community Resolution is not misrepresented to the recipient. It is more than simply giving advice and warning.'*
- 3.10 Instances where suspects requested legal advice before accepting a CRN were discussed and Officers talked about allowing more time to facilitate this. The Guidance had addressed this by stating that Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 rights and the right to independent legal advice should be highlighted and that *'if the suspect wishes to seek legal advice before interview, or agreeing and signing the CRN it is appropriate for the Investigation Officer to give the suspect time for this to take place...'* While Body Worn Video was generally used as part of responding to a call or incident, and the Guidance advised best practice was to obtain the verbal complaint in this way, discussions with Officers indicated it was not routinely activated when discussing the Community Resolution. **As an Area for Improvement routine quality assurance and monitoring should examine frequency of access to legal advice and use of Body Worn Video with any learning informing how CRNs are issued.**
- 3.11 It was acknowledged that CRNs were an opportunity to reduce workload, and some reported that pressure to close cases existed at times with a CRN *'counting the same as a file'* in this respect. However, Officers demonstrated a clear grasp of the need to investigate and establish the facts of the offence before considering a CRN. The enquiries included criminal record checks and searches on the NICHE computer system for any pending matters or prior occurrences, as one Officer stated: *'there may be 20 or 30 occurrences, maybe they're not eligible' [...]* *'it's about sifting occurrences, weighing everything up and setting out the rationale.'*

- 3.12 During file review, the 10-point checklist for issuing a CRN was mostly used by Investigating Officers, which required consideration of prior offending. However, the question was not always answered accurately and was an area for focus as part of routine supervision. The question ('The recipient's previous offending is eligible') required a 'Yes' or 'No' answer with rationale often not included. This may have improved detection of ineligibility by forcing justification for the answer chosen.

## **SUPERVISION AND COMPLIANCE**

---

- 3.13 Supervisors considered that the Guidance simplified the approach to CRNs and generally agreed that requiring Supervisor authorisation in all cases enhanced accountability. District Inspectors had been assured by the level of Sergeant checks and direction given to Officers in individual cases but had reviewed the approach if further concerns were apparent or more detail from the Investigating Officer was needed.
- 3.14 In line with the Guidance, all cases reviewed by CJI had Supervisory authorisation, and this occurred at the required level in all cases but one. In this instance, the PSNI Inspector authorisation was subsequently prompted by an internal PSNI audit. In about half or 14, of the 29 cases, there was evidence of satisfactory rationale outlining the basis for deciding to offer a CRN but in other cases rationale was limited. In some instances, the offender had multiple involved occurrences and while these often concluded as 'File Pending Further Evidence/No Further Police Action,' the volume and gravity would have benefited from explicit consideration. In other cases, although prior offending had not ruled out a CRN according to the PSNI criteria, more detailed justification was needed due to significant offending history. There was over 100 prior offences in two cases.
- 3.15 An audit undertaken by the PSNI Area Performance Quality Assurance for August to October 2024 had already highlighted a gap in Supervisor rationale and use of templates within the Officer Enquiry Log (OEL). The Criminal Justice Branch highlighted this to CJI as an area it would continue to monitor and anticipated that consistent use of the Supervisor template would enhance the quality of rationale and, in consequence, more explicit direction on the appropriateness of use.
- 3.16 Before determining the appropriateness of a CRN, it was necessary to establish that there was sufficient evidence to prove the offence. The record mostly showed statements gathered either at the time of the offence through notebook interviews or having been scheduled at the police station. Body Worn Video had been used in some instances to gather evidence related to the offence.
- 3.17 CJI Inspectors did not review the suitability of evidence or admissions as part of this file review. However, the Criminal Justice Branch flagged cases that required review for potential rescinding and held a central record. Between August

2024 and October 2024, nine such cases were flagged. Five were rescinded for 'File pending Further Evidence,' 'No File Decision,' or 'No Further Action.' Although only a small number, it showed the importance of oversight to ensure sufficiency of evidence. It also emphasised the importance of PPS involvement in quality assurance to ensure compliance and wider learning (see Operational Recommendation 1).

- 3.18 Six of the 29 cases reviewed by CJI involved a CRN issued outside the scope of Guidance. As this had involved a random dip sample, it was not an indication of error rates in CRN use overall. It was, however, a notable proportion out of scope. Reasons had included a Court order or formal criminal sanction for the same offence issued within the previous two years, the offender was subject to Court bail, the offences were out of scope, or there was a pending investigation for a similar offence. There were also cases unsuitable for a CRN even though the criteria had been met and this type of circumstance is discussed below.

## VICTIM ENGAGEMENT

- 3.19 Officers noted the importance of being victim-led. While criteria stated that the victim could not veto a decision to issue a CRN, Officers were strongly influenced by engagement with them. In cases reviewed, victim engagement was evident in 20 cases out of 23 where this was applicable; in three cases it was not evident from the OEL. In six cases, victim engagement was not applicable as there was no personal victim as such, for example, the case involved a possession offence.
- 3.20 Overall, more detail about engagement with the victim, how the CRN was explained and their views about it would have been beneficial. In one case, the victim was informed that nothing could be done in the event of non-compliance with the resolution. In instances of non-completion Officers were required to update the 'Resolution Outcome,' update the victim and submit the file for alternative disposal. This could have included a Caution or charge/report file to the PPS. It was important victims were made aware of this.
- 3.21 It was not possible to tell from the system if the victim had been referred to Victim Support Northern Ireland. The PSNI advised this occurred automatically as a result of an Information Technology script unless the victim opted out. In two cases checked with the PSNI as part of the file review, the Victim Support Northern Ireland referral had not been submitted, which showed the importance of including this as part of routine Quality Assurance checks.
- 3.22 In a few cases reviewed by CJI, a specific investigation report was used and included a question about whether a 'victims of crime' leaflet had been given. When the investigation report template had not been used, there was generally no indication on the OEL if a leaflet had been provided. There was no evidence of a victim needs assessment on the file, however, there was evidence of referrals to services in a few cases.

## RESOLUTIONS

3.23 Speedy justice was reported by Officers as the main benefit of Community Resolution. The potential to provide more satisfactory outcomes for victims was also discussed. The CRN booklet listed possible resolutions as follows:

- *Make an apology in writing/in person/both;*
- *Make payment of £        for the loss or damage;*
- *Make good loss or damage by: arranging repair/cleaning or personally completing repair/cleaning;*
- *Perform hours unpaid work doing;*
- *Provide name/address and sign banning order/agreement to not enter: [named premises]; and*
- *To complete offence awareness session/restorative intervention (YJA/CBRJ [Community Based Restorative Justice]/Other) by/on [date].*

3.24 Officers gave examples of resolutions where there had been timely and tangible benefits for victims. This included cases in which business owners received prompt payment for theft or repairs to damage caused. NPT Officers discussed opportunities to build relationships within some communities including with parents who were described as having been 'absolutely fantastic' and 'fully supportive' of Officers' approach in using CRNs.

3.25 From CJI's file review there was evidence of circumstances in which use of a CRN had been beneficial both in terms of meeting what the victim wanted as an outcome and timeliness:

### CASE EXAMPLES 1 AND 2: REPARATIVE AND TIMELY RESOLUTIONS

An altercation between two neighbours was reported to the PSNI. After speaking with both parties, each accepted responsibility for what had occurred and accepted a CRN for the offence of common assault. A verbal apology was made by each of the adults and both agreed not to interact with each other. The CRN was authorised by the Sergeant and the record showed that all parties had been spoken to at the time and were content with police actions. The matter was resolved on the same day.

Police received a report of stolen goods from a supermarket store. Two suspects were identified and alleged to have paid for only some items at the self-checkout. The value of the items stolen was established (both adults had stolen goods to a value of less than £50.00). The victim, the owner of the shop, agreed to a Community Resolution. The resolution was an apology to the owner and the stolen items repaid in full. There was supervisory authorisation, and the CRN was completed on the same day as the offences.

- 3.26 There was an acknowledgement that resolution programmes for some offences were limited in cases involving adults. In drugs related cases the CRN had often involved an 'on-the-spot' apology, and some Officers indicated that a drugs awareness session may have been beneficial. This had been available in Fermanagh and Omagh PSNI District and delivered by a charity providing drug and alcohol services. This was delivered as a one-off group session with a PSNI Officer present. Although there had been no formal monitoring by the PSNI or evaluation of impact, anecdotally it was beneficial and included the opportunity for recipients to receive further information and referrals.
- 3.27 A District Community Planning Sergeant had been recently designated to ease the process of making referrals to the drugs education/awareness session. This was expected to maximise use where appropriate and enable monitoring. Officers reported that availability of the course was positive but not practicable in all cases, for example, if the recipient lived outside the District. Where the offence involved very small quantities, or the recipients lived considerable distances away, proportionality could be an issue. While on one hand CRNs were meant to deal quickly with the case; on another Officers considered *'an apology for cannabis possession is a tick box and doesn't feel like it hits home.'*
- 3.28 Within the areas for the CBRJ CRN Pilot, positive relationships between Officers and the organisations were reported. Officers within the relevant District areas discussed engaging regularly with the organisations but not for the delivery of CRNs. CJI had completed a review of Community Restorative Justice Ireland and its accredited schemes (the Schemes) in May 2023 and had reported that there were 21 CRNs in 2021 reducing to six in 2022.<sup>57</sup> The numbers of cases referred to CBRJ organisations as part of the current CRN pilot project had also been low (less than 10).
- 3.29 The possibility that CRNs were too 'low level' for meaningful restorative engagement to take place was surmised, and CJI understood there were plans to develop a CBRJ formal sanction outcome as part of the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy. However, options to enhance pilot referrals were also highlighted including more accessible information and training about restorative justice to support Officers when explaining this CRN option. Examples of suitable CBRJ CRNs may also have been helpful.
- 3.30 The Out of Court Disposals Working Group was continuing to monitor the pilot. However, a proactive approach to enhancing referrals was needed. There was no assurance that members were sighted on all the issues or driving a clear solution. While ensuring CRNs remained a less bureaucratic system,<sup>58</sup> ways to maximise

57 CJI, *Review of Community Restorative Justice and Its Accredited Schemes, May 2023* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-review-of-community-restorative-justice-ireland-and-its-accredited-schemes/>

58 As recognised by CJI – see CJI, *Police use of Discretionary Disposals Incorporating Penalty Notices, January 2015* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/police-use-of-discretion-incorporating-penalty-notices/>

referrals and encourage Officers' offering this option were areas to examine. There was also potential for learning from Fermanagh and Omagh PSNI District's approach in designating a Supervisor to oversee referrals (see Strategic Recommendation 3).

- 3.31 In most (27 out of the 29) cases reviewed by CJI, the CRN was completed. In the two cases of non-completion, confirmation from the YJA was not available at the time of closing in one; in the other, payment for damage had not been confirmed. In most instances where the resolution was an apology it appeared this occurred on-the-spot in the presence of the Investigating Officer. Greater detail was needed to confirm this was in fact what had occurred and what the apology entailed.
- 3.32 Rationale explaining why the resolution agreed was appropriate was weak at times. In two cases involving harassment, Inspectors were unable to see how a CRN was appropriate, albeit an indication that the victim agreed to the CRN was evident. Detail outlining how all safeguarding concerns had been addressed and rationale for why a CRN and the resolution – an apology – was considered proportionate was lacking.

### CASE EXAMPLE 3: HARASSMENT

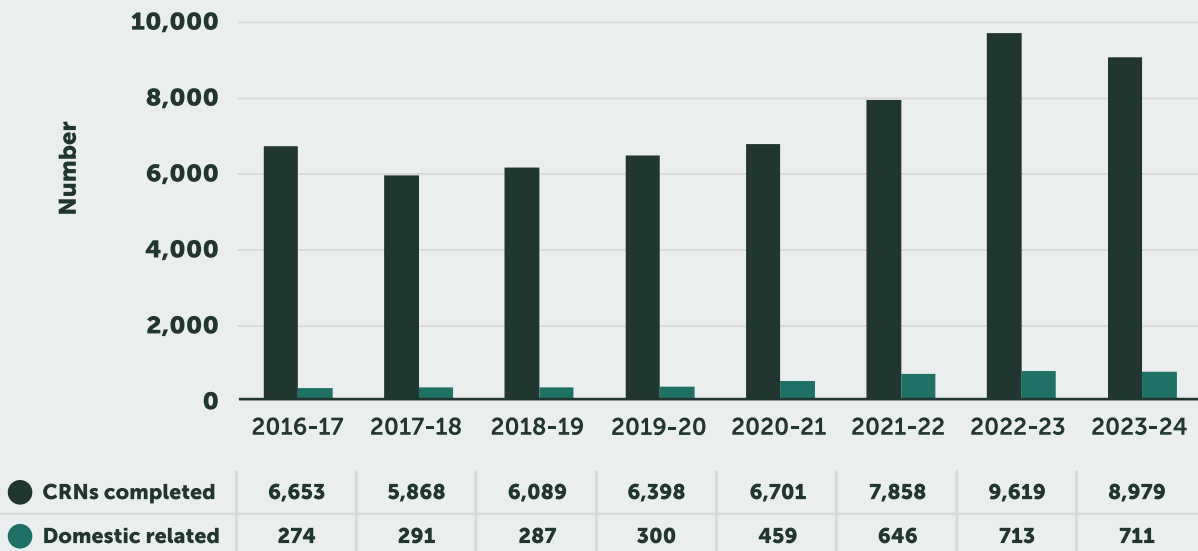
The PSNI received a report about unwanted and distressing contact from the offender to the victim. The investigation established that there had been many messages sent to the victim over many months. On enquiry it was apparent that the offender had an extensive criminal record. While the offence was treated as harassment and therefore deemed eligible for a CRN, rationale had not adequately addressed the continued nature of the behaviour or the cumulative impact on the victim, or the offender's record. The case was retrospectively reviewed by the Criminal Justice Branch and determined not suitable for a CRN. It was decided that the CRN would remain, but advice would be provided to the Investigating Officer.

- 3.33 Harassment was an eligible offence with the criteria for a CRN. Guidance distinguished it from stalking to ensure Officers had not used CRNs in this circumstance, *'The Investigating Officer should also be mindful of the potential overlap or similarities between harassment and stalking offences, keeping the F.O.U.R. acronym (Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted and Repeated) at the forefront when investigating these types of offences. Stalking is not an authorised CRN offence.'* However, there was potential for high harm in cases of harassment and greater scrutiny in these types of cases both in respect of Supervisors authorisations and as part of quality assurance was needed. **As an Area for Improvement, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should take steps to ensure that quality assurance of Community Resolution Notices examines whether resolutions are appropriate and proportionate to the offending with cases involving personal victims, particularly violence against the person, having a targeted focus.**

## CRNs COMPLETED FOR DOMESTIC RELATED OFFENCES

- 3.34 The PSNI monthly reports to the Out of Court Disposals Working Group noted that not all domestic related CRNs were for domestic offences *'for example, police may attend a verbal only domestic but drugs are located and the offence will have a domestic flag. The CRN is given for possession of a controlled substance and therefore not for a domestically motivated offence.'*
- 3.35 The numbers of CRNs completed by financial year had not yet included the period in which CRNs expanded to include intimate or former intimate partner domestic abuse related offences. Monthly CRN reports flagged domestic related CRNs, but a manual trawl was needed to determine if any had involved an intimate or former intimate partner. Criminal Justice Branch oversight for the initial two months of the revisions (August 2024 and September 2024) showed a 31% increase in CRNs for domestic related offences compared to the equivalent two months in the previous year. While close monitoring was necessary, determining trends from recent monthly data was not possible. Domestic abuse offences resolved by CRN were being checked by an additional Officer within Criminal Justice Branch.
- 3.36 The numbers of completed domestic related CRNs were reported by the Criminal Justice Branch to the Out of Court Disposals Working Group (Figure 2, relating to the replaced 2021 Guidance):<sup>59</sup> Figures showed an upward trend which had been occurring prior to the PSNI's revision of Guidance for CRNs. There had been limited analysis of the reasons for this. It was also not clear what proportion of domestic related CRNs had been issued for non-domestically motivated offences in accordance with the scenario outlined by the PSNI (attending a domestic related call but issuing a CRN for a different offence).

**Figure 2: Number of CRNs completed – domestic related 2015-16 to 2023-24\***



\*PSNI management information only.

59 PSNI, CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 – Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board.

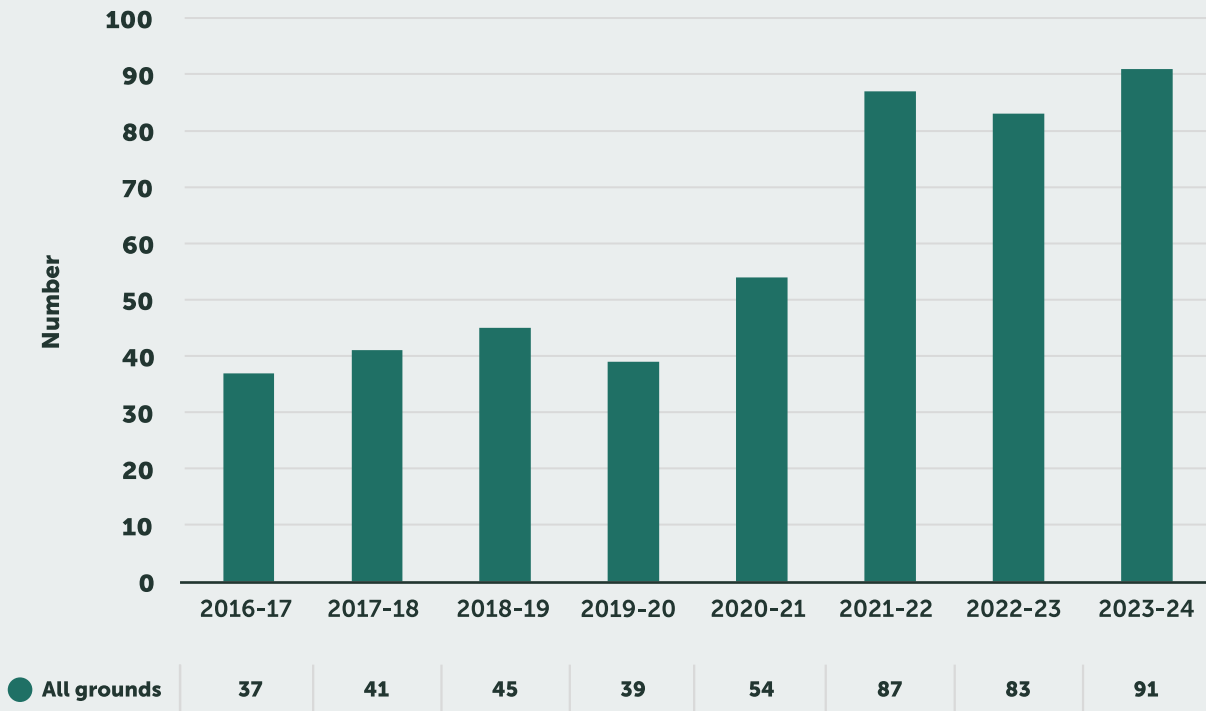
- 3.37 Officers who met with Inspectors said that issuing a CRN in domestic cases would be very unlikely but talked about 'outliers' where it could be appropriate provided the Guidance was followed. Most referred to scenarios involving a sibling dispute or possibly a child and parent but emphasised this depended on the circumstances. As one Supervisor noted, the broader context including all child safeguarding risks required examination. The Officers that CJI met had no experience of using CRNs in cases of domestic abuse perpetrated by intimate or former intimate partners. Inspectors that CJI met had limited experience of authorising CRNs for domestic abuse in any scenario and expected use of CRNs to be extremely rare in this circumstance.
- 3.38 CJI reviewed nine domestic abuse cases as part of its file review. All had a completed Public Protection Notice (PPN), which was graded standard although in one case the PPN had not been submitted. This showed the importance of Supervisory and quality assurance checks. There were referrals on record including for *Operation Encompass*.<sup>60</sup> Two of the cases reviewed involved intimate partner domestic abuse. In these cases, there was evidence of Inspector authority. In one case, the Supervisor directed the Investigating Officer to ensure checks had been completed, for example, support offered and referrals made.
- 3.39 These cases, however, entailed complexities and in one, the victim's views on use of a CRN were not apparent. The manner of the response suggested more could have been done to engage the victim and they refused all referrals for support. CJI Inspectors did not examine all domestic abuse related CRNs issued by the PSNI during the one-month period reviewed to establish if they had been used for intimate or former intimate partner perpetrators but this needed to form part of the PSNI's routine monitoring.
- 3.40 The importance of scrutinising use in all such cases could not be over emphasised and CJI had reservations about the extension of CRNs to intimate partner domestic abuse related offences. The inclusion of Public Protection Branch domestic abuse experts within oversight arrangements was needed and revisiting the decision to include these offences should inform part of the Criminal Justice Branch review of the Guidance (see Operational Recommendation 2).

60 *'Operation Encompass is a Police and Education Early Intervention Safeguarding Partnership enabling support for children and young people who are experiencing domestic abuse.'* See PSNI Service Instruction SI3417 *Child Protection*, available at [Child Protection 17 October 2023.pdf](#).

## CRNs COMPLETED FOR HATE RELATED OFFENCES

3.41 The Criminal Justice Branch reported numbers of CRNs completed with a hate motivation perceived as shown in Figure 3.<sup>61</sup>

**Figure 3: Number of CRNs completed with a hate motivation perceived 2016-17 to 2023-24\***



\* PSNI management information Only; NB: Figures provided for all grounds (racist, religion/faith, sexual orientation, disability, transphobic, sectarian) due to low numbers within some individual categories.

3.42 This did not include CRNs completed using the expanded Guidance, which permitted CRN use where evidence of hostility was present with additional criteria (as outlined in Chapter 2). Data showed that use of CRNs across all categories of hate crimes had increased since 2016-17 and more recently since 2020-21 prior to revisions of the Guidance. However, numbers for the different categories of race, religion/faith, sexual orientation, disability, transphobic and sectarian hate crime varied over each year making it difficult to discern patterns. Numbers were too low to disaggregate here but close and ongoing scrutiny was important.

3.43 CJI reviewed a small number of cases flagged as hate motivated as part of file review. There was evidence of approaches within scope with victim engagement, a low VRAM and Inspector rationale apparent. However, in two cases where the record indicated hostility demonstrated through words used, CJI was not assured about the response. In one case, it was unclear if all identified offenders

61 PSNI, CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 – Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board.

had been dealt with and an unacceptable period had lapsed. In another, while the victim was content with an apology, the record required more detail on how the hate element was investigated:

#### CASE EXAMPLE 4: HATE CRIME

There was a report to the PSNI of an assault on a child. The initial report specified that words were used during the assault, which indicated the offence was aggravated by hostility. The record stated that the attack was sustained, and evidence of physical injuries were logged. A PSNI hate crime auditor advised that a VRAM and Supervisor review was needed. The Supervisor's review advised that a CRN was not suitable; however the Investigating Officer was directed to consult with the YDO. A subsequent entry on the OEL noted that having consulted with the victim and parent there was no hate perceived. The suspects were interviewed with Appropriate Adults, admitted their involvement and showed remorse. It was recorded that if all offenders agreed and the victims and parent's views were sought, a CRN could be issued. The victim and parent agreed to a CRN preferring this to Court and from the record appeared satisfied with this approach. However, there was nothing to show if there was further investigation of the initial statement about hostile words used or if this formed part of the CRN programme.

- 3.44 In its review of the response to racist hate crime by the PSNI, the NIPB noted that, subject to review, the use of CRNs in some cases for hate crimes merited testing. However, it reported that, *'The committee is concerned for example that while the perpetrator must admit the offence... he or she is not required to admit the hate element (it not being part of the hate crime) and that the hate element will not be recorded.'*<sup>62</sup> CJI was also concerned about recording the hate element where a CRN was used, which was potentially more problematic with the extended criteria, as well as reflecting how the resolution addressed hostility toward the victim.<sup>63</sup> Referrals to the Victim Support Northern Ireland Hate Crime Advocacy Service also required evidencing.
- 3.45 The appropriateness of a CRN and support where the victim had experienced repeat victimisation by the same offender was a matter that required additional Supervisor rationale within the Guidance. However, repeat offending by different offenders was also a concern, which could be apparent in hate crime cases. In one case reviewed, the individual had been victimised repeatedly over time although not by the individual being considered for a CRN. This factor needed addressed when considering suitability and within the Inspector rationale for approving a CRN.

62 Northern Ireland Policing Board, *Thematic Review of Policing Race Hate Crime, 2017* available at

<https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/media-files/race-hate-crime-thematic-review.PDF>.

63 See also Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, *Racist hate Crime: Human Rights and the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland September 2013*, which recommended that 'The criminal justice agencies, in particular the PSNI and the PPS, should introduce measures to ensure that staff are made fully aware that 'aggravated by hostility' under the 2004 Order, Article 2, includes both 'motivation' and 'demonstration' of racial hostility. This measure should be subject to intermittent and regular review;' and that 'the PSNI should ensure that, in addition to an effective investigation of the base offence, equal attention is paid to investigating suspected racial hostility.' (available at <https://nihrc.org/publication/detail/racist-hate-crime-human-rights-and-the-criminal-justice-system-in-nort>).

## OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should undertake an evaluation of Community Resolution Notices for the following crimes, with a view to re-examining whether inclusion within the authorised list of offences should be retained:

- intimate or former intimate partner domestic abuse. In the meantime, the Public Protection Branch should be involved in oversight of domestic related Community Resolution Notices to include all cases in which a Community Resolution Notice is issued in a case with intimate or former intimate partners; and
- hate related offences to include an examination of whether the hate element was being adequately investigated and recorded. In the meantime, Police Service of Northern Ireland hate crime experts should be involved in oversight of all hate crime related Community Resolution Notices.

## CRNs COMPLETED FOR DRUG RELATED OFFENCES

3.46 Drug related offences were the most common offence type resolved by CRN, representing 17% of the number of CRNs completed when CRNs were first introduced in 2015-16, and at least 30% from 2017-18 having reached as much as 41% of CRNs in 2020-21. This meant CRNs were mostly issued for an offence type where the available resolutions were least relevant. It was too early for the Criminal Justice Branch to have established if recent expansion in drugs offences, categories and quantities had resulted in more drug offence related Community Resolutions. The data provided by the PSNI related to the use of the replaced 2021 Guidance (Figure 4):<sup>64</sup>

64 PSNI, CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 - Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board.

**Figure 4: Number of CRNs completed for drug related offences 2016-17 to 2023-24\***



\*PSNI management information only

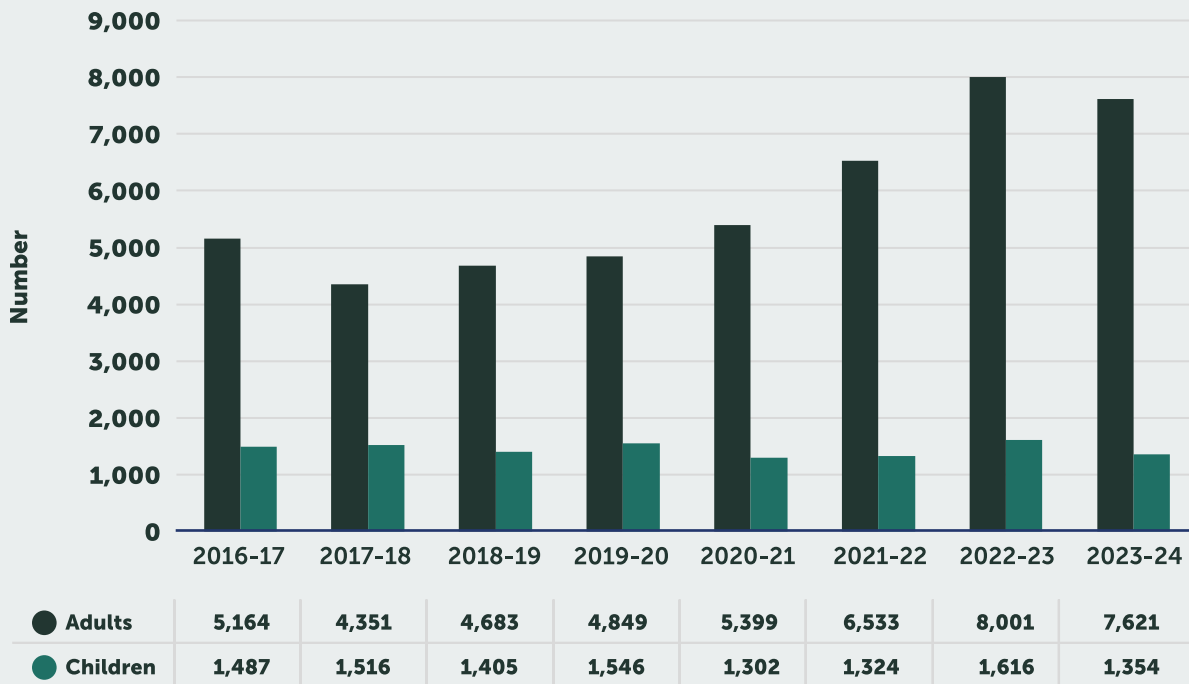
3.47 Officers recognised a CRN as an appropriate and timely disposal in appropriate circumstances for drug related offences. However, some expressed caution about the recently increased quantities and use for certain Class A drugs especially in the absence of a drugs education programme. The PPS indicated it was keen to prioritise this as part of joint quality assurance arrangements.

## CRNs COMPLETED BY ADULTS AND CHILDREN

3.48 Since 2016-17, the numbers of CRNs completed by adults had increased by 47.6%. The numbers completed by children had decreased by 8.9% (Figure 5).<sup>65</sup> In 2023-24, over four-fifths of CRNs (7,621) were completed by adults and less than a fifth (1,354) by children.

65 PSNI, CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 – Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board.

**Figure 5: Number of CRNs completed by Adults and Children 2016-17 to 2023-24\***



\*PSNI management information only

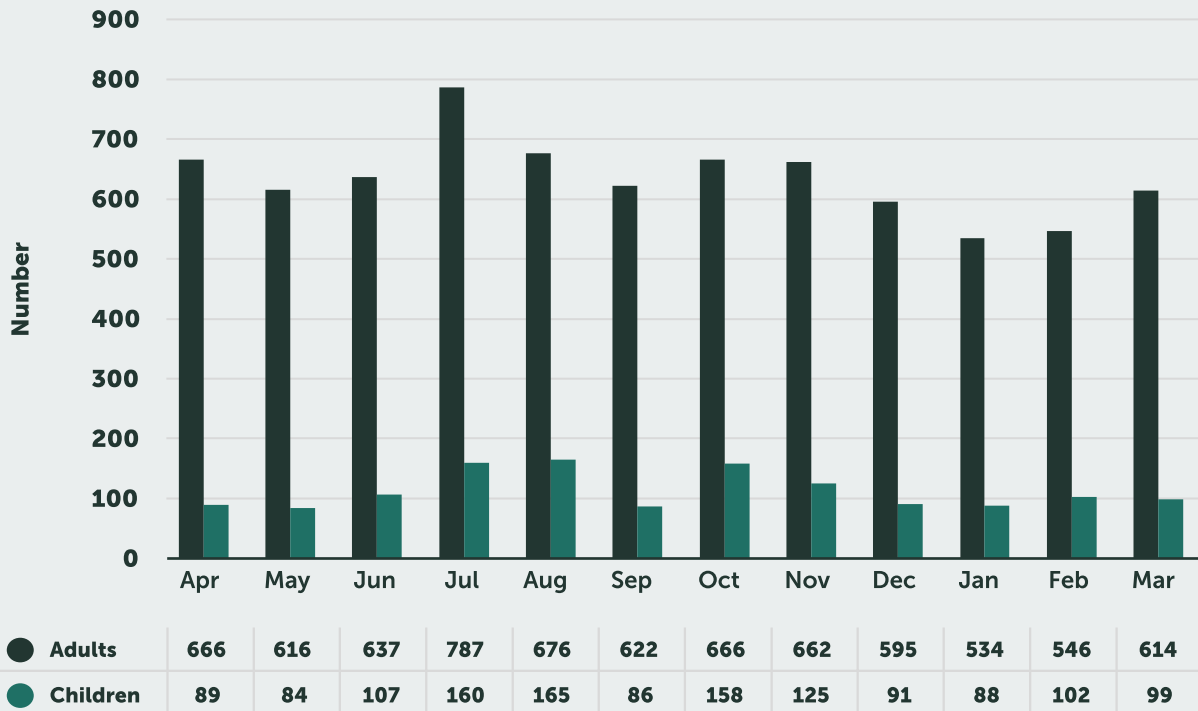
3.49 While this distinguished between children and adults, there was scope to disaggregate CRNs issued to young adults. A review of evidence in England related to out of Court resolutions for 18 to 24-year-olds reported that in contrast to children, *‘Young adults do not have standardised processes that include input from a range of services for determining outcomes and interventions, and as a result these can often be carried out solely by police officers without the time, training and instruction to perform any specialist needs assessment.’*<sup>66</sup>

3.50 Numbers of Community Resolutions completed by adults and children varied each month (Figure 6),<sup>67</sup> although there had been no analysis of the reasons and the PSNI intended for this to form part of its ongoing monitoring with the Out of Court Disposals Working Group as the new Guidance embedded.

66 Centre for Justice Innovation, *Out of Court Resolutions and Young Adults*, undated available at [https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2025/out\\_of\\_court\\_resolutions\\_and\\_young\\_adults\\_briefing.pdf](https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2025/out_of_court_resolutions_and_young_adults_briefing.pdf)

67 PSNI, *CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 – Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board*.

**Figure 6: Number of CRNs completed by adults and children 2023-24 (by month)\***



\*PSNI management information only

- 3.51 The proportion of children referred to the YJA for a CRN programme had not been tracked by the PSNI. Whether all cases were appropriately referred was an area for monitoring. The YJA report card for 2023-24 recorded 1,157 CRN programmes delivered to children with a 98.5% completion rate.<sup>68</sup> PSNI data showed 1,354 CRNs completed by children in the same period. Officers indicated that some cases were closed without the need for referral. An example was given of damage caused to a vacant property. This was resolved almost immediately by an apology and repair.
- 3.52 CJI's Youth Interventions Inspection Report noted an increase in younger children aged 10 to 13 years entering the criminal justice system. Analysis of children issued with CRNs by age would be important. The YJA in partnership with the PSNI and the PPS was undertaking an evaluation of CRN use with children, which was ongoing at the time of inspection fieldwork.
- 3.53 Research by Queen's University Belfast on different groups of children represented within the youth justice system reported that living arrangements particularly lived experience of care, and additional needs including undiagnosed and 'hidden' need, were factors that could negatively influence children's interactions with the justice system.<sup>69</sup> This was important to review as the Out of Court Disposals Working

68 YJA, *Performance Impact Report 2023-2024* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/YJA%20Performance%20Impact%20Report%202023-2024%20-%20Tagged.pdf>

69 McAlister, S., McNamee, C., Corr, ML., Butler, M, *Over-representation in the youth justice system in Northern Ireland: full report, March 2022 DoJ / QUB* available at [https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/377036690/Over\\_rep\\_in\\_YJS\\_Main\\_Report\\_Final\\_March\\_2022.pdf](https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/377036690/Over_rep_in_YJS_Main_Report_Final_March_2022.pdf)

Group developed the maturity of its oversight and monitoring. An important line of enquiry, for example, was whether all children were being provided an equal opportunity for informal Community Resolution before being referred for a prosecution decision.

3.54 All cases with children reviewed by CJI had an Appropriate Adult involved and YDO input. Although in one case YDO approval was not sought prior to issuing the CRN and the offence was out of scope. The Guidance noted that the final decision regarding appropriateness of a resolution rested with the YDO, who would additionally consider the child's best interests and have access to more information. Where a child was not referred to the YJA for a CRN programme, the suitability of resolutions required careful assessment and rationale. For example, where children had not reached 16 years of age, unpaid work or service for the community was prohibited as part of Youth Conference Plans.<sup>70</sup> The Guidance had not addressed whether similar considerations applied to Community Resolution.

3.55 It had been imperative to pursue all lines of enquiry and ensure referral to the PSNI Central Referral Unit where any circumstances required this including potential exploitation. There was scope to link with the PSNI Youth Justice Service Instruction, which included CRNs. It highlighted Police Officers' role in identifying vulnerability and advised:<sup>71</sup>

***"It is important that when Officers come into contact with Youth Offenders, they can spot the signs associated with vulnerability. An offender may be deemed as vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves, or others, from harm or exploitation."***

***Police often come into contact with young people in crisis, who have already suffered or are at risk of harm. The ability to recognise vulnerabilities and, to maintain an open and enquiring mind, present crucial opportunities for appropriate action, for example, safeguarding."***

3.56 In most cases reviewed by CJI, there was evidence of referral to Social Services. Children referred to the YJA required a longer time for the CRN to conclude. The timeframe often appeared appropriate; however, this needed more detailed explanation where more than several weeks lapsed. The timeliness and ease of referral mechanisms was a crucial area for monitoring. There were, however, mostly positive examples of Police Officers engaging with children, families and victims to address offending behaviour using a CRN.

70 Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 Article 3C 'Youth Conference Plans' as inserted by Section 57 of Justice (Northern Ireland) Act) 2002.

71 PSNI, *Service Instruction, Youth Justice SI0817, 6 January 2017* available at <https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/202401/Youth%20Justice%2030%20January%202024.pdf>

## CASE EXAMPLE 5: REFERRAL TO THE YJA FOR A CRN PROGRAMME

There was a report to police about children graffitiing; several children were met by police and showed the Officers where the graffiti had taken place. The children were brought home by the Officers. After discussion, the parents were very supportive of police action. The Officers explained to the children and parents that there would be a discussion with a Sergeant and advice from a YDO and they would return. Options for voluntary interview, a solicitor and access to additional support were explained. Social Services referrals were submitted and the YDO and Sergeant approval with rationale was recorded. The victims were contacted and agreed to the CRN. The children completed an awareness session with the YJA. The time between offence and CRN completion was just over three months, however, regular updates and records of contact were exemplary showing sensitivity to the children's age and time needed to support engagement by the parents. This time facilitated accessibility of the outcome ensuring voluntary interviews, victim liaison, solicitors and other support could be arranged.

- 3.57 Officers reported that YDOs were valued as an important source of advice and guidance when considering a CRN for a child. YDOs discussed checking all cases for suitability and were able to conduct more detailed checks including in relation to child safeguarding.
- 3.58 The system had not always reflected that a CRN has been issued because the Officer was waiting for confirmation of completion from the YJA. In this circumstance, YDOs could erroneously approve another CRN. The importance of updating the system to note a CRN was pending was emphasised. Offending online and through social media was highlighted as an increasing area of concern and the opportunity to divert children by use of CRN if eligible and appropriate was welcomed.

### Disclosure and retention of biometric data

- 3.59 In its examination of discretionary disposals CJI noted a 2012 report recommending that these were exempted from disclosure in the interests of children.<sup>72</sup> The Youth Justice Review had made a similar recommendation.<sup>73</sup> As CJI had noted previously:<sup>74</sup>

72 *A managed approach: a review of the criminal records regime in Northern Ireland Part 2: Sunita Mason Independent Advisor for Criminality Information in England and Wales* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-criminal-records-regime-northern-ireland>.

73 *A Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland 2011*.

74 *CJI, Police use of Discretionary Disposals Incorporating Penalty Notices, January 2015* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/police-use-of-discretion-incorporating-penalty-notices/>

*'Inspectors believe that the extended range of offences, which have been dealt with by way of discretion, exacerbates the risk to public safety of exempting [Discretionary Disposals] from disclosure, identified by the PSNI in the evaluation report. That risk, identified as small by the PSNI, could be further mitigated by strict management and governance of the use of discretion as recommended in Chapter 2.'*

*'What must be avoided is a situation where a young person is denied employment based upon a single, minor misdemeanor with no further re-offending and this must be balanced with any risk or potential risk to the public. In a situation where the use of [Discretionary Disposals] is operating within a robust, clear and well established governance framework Inspectors believe the benefits of exempting discretion from disclosure would outweigh the risks.'*

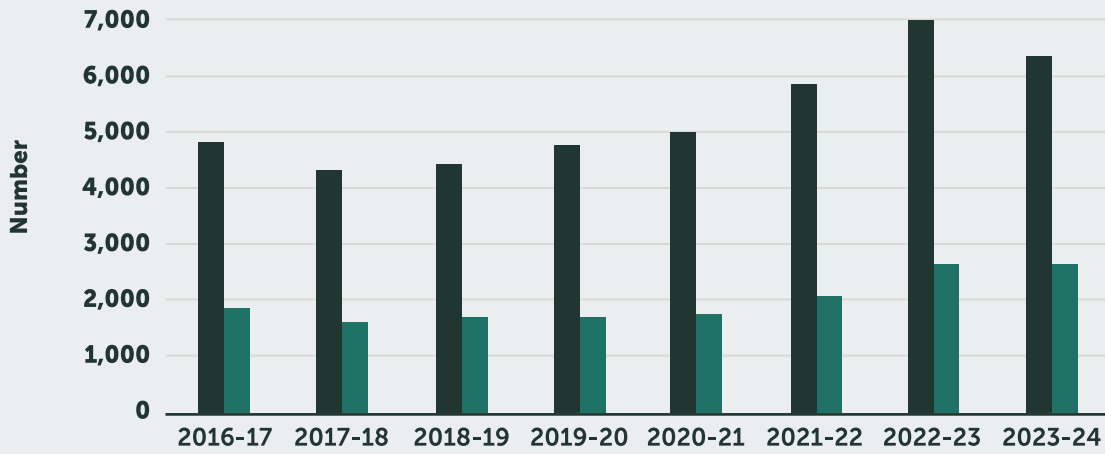
This remained an area for the PSNI and the Out of Court Disposals Working Group to examine as the Guidance was embedded and reviewed and robustness of governance and quality assurance developed.

- 3.60 NPCC guidance on the use of community resolutions included instructions on biometric data obtained as a result of an investigation closed by way of such a resolution, *'Biometrics obtained during the course of investigation should be destroyed once case closed as outcome 8'* [a Community Resolution outcome]. **As an Area for Improvement this (retention of biometric data) was a matter for the PSNI to consider within its Guidance as it had not been addressed within the most recently revised version.**

## CRNs COMPLETED BY GENDER

- 3.61 The Criminal Justice Branch reported numbers of CRNs completed by gender as part of its monthly update to the Out of Court Disposals Working Group. It was important to note again that this included numbers only and there was opportunity for further analysis. For example, CRN use by gender as a proportion of overall outcome rates and an assessment if usage by gender was in line with what was expected would have been helpful. This linked to the discussion in Chapter 2 and Strategic Recommendation 2.

**Figure 7: Number of CRNs completed by Gender 2016-17 to 2023-24\***



● Male	4,828	4,307	4,429	4,731	4,985	5,818	6,985	6,341
● Female	1,818	1,554	1,652	1,650	1,706	2,023	2,611	2,599
● Transgender	#	7	#	#	#	12	9	10
● Unknown	#	0	#	#	#	5	14	29

\*PSNI management information only. Note: figures for Transgender and Unknown in 2016-17; 2018-19; 2019-20; 2020-21 marked # due to low numbers in either one or both categories.

3.62 As shown by the numbers presented from PSNI management information in Figure 7, in and around a quarter of CRNs were completed by females although this had fluctuated over the period shown and had been as high as 29% in 2023-24.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> PSNI, CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 – Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board.

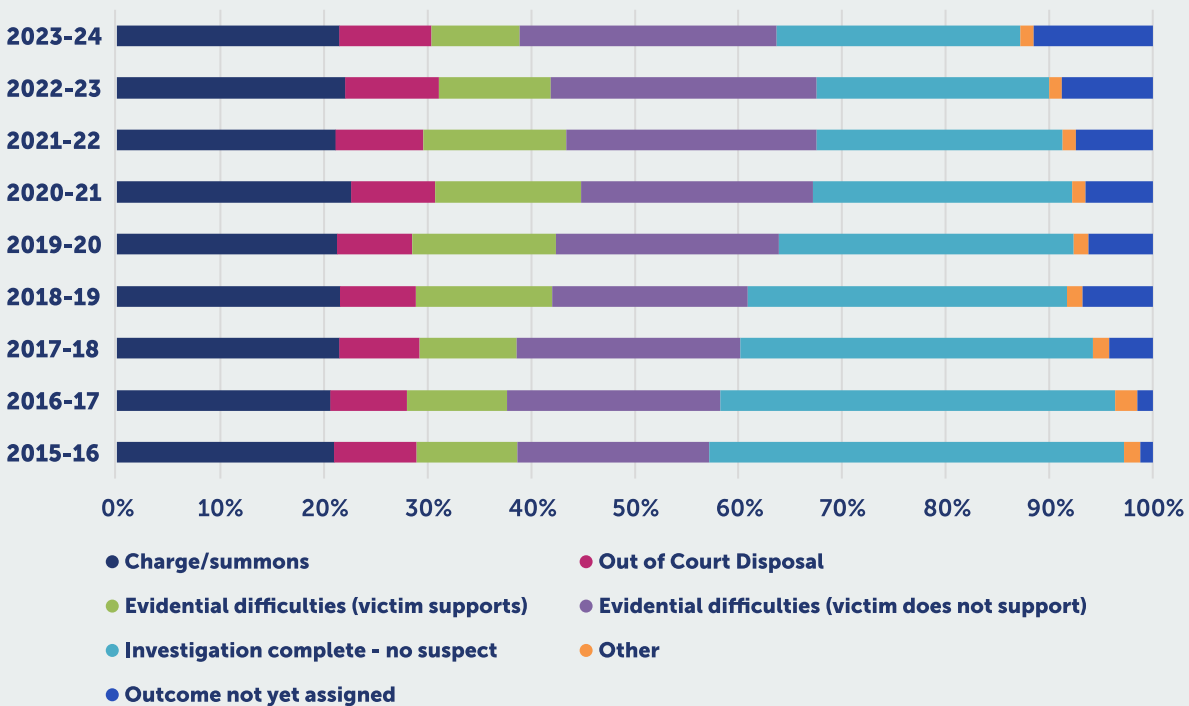
# CHAPTER 4: OUTCOMES

## CRIMES RESOLVED BY COMMUNITY RESOLUTION

### Outcomes assigned to all crimes

4.1 In the period 2015-16 to 2023-24, between 7% and 9% of all recorded crimes were resolved by out of Court disposals (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Outcomes that have since been assigned to all crimes recorded 2015-16 to 2023-24<sup>76</sup>**



Note: Other includes the outcome groups taken into consideration, Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest, Action undertaken by another body/agency and Diversionary, educational or intervention activity.

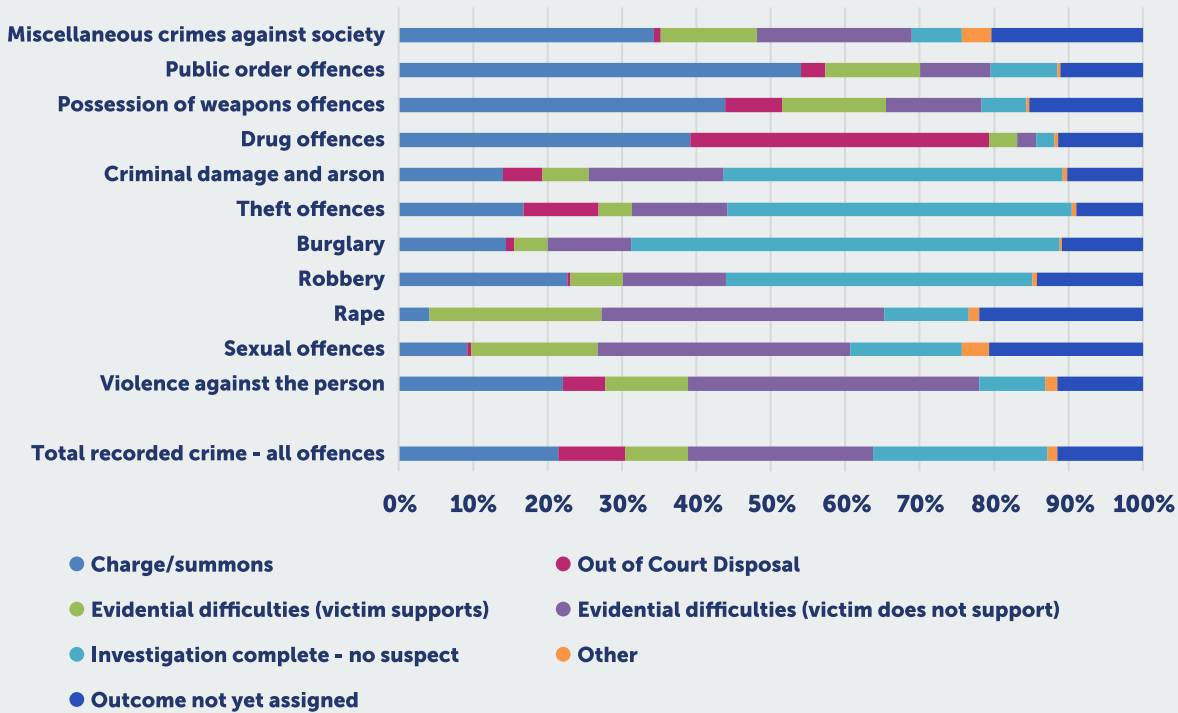
4.2 In the same period, informal out of Court outcomes had increased from 4% to just over 7% of outcomes assigned to crimes, while formal out of Court disposals comprising Cautions and PNDs had decreased (see Table 8a in Appendix 1 for detail). In 2023-24, informal out of Court disposals, namely CRNs, were the main out of Court disposal representing four out of five out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes recorded by the PSNI.

<sup>76</sup> Figure copied from *PSNI, Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015/16 to 2023/24* associated Figure 1.1 available at [Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015/16 to 2023/24](#).

**Drugs, thefts and violence against the person offences**

4.3 Drugs offences showed the highest proportion of crimes resolved by CRNs (33.7%), followed by thefts (8.1%) and violence against the person (4.6%) (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Outcomes assigned to crimes recorded during 2023-24 by outcome group and offence group<sup>77</sup>**



Note: Other includes the outcome groups taken into consideration, Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest, Action undertaken by another body/agency and Diversionary, educational or intervention activity

4.4 Across these offence types, there had been an increase in informal out of Court sanctions and a decrease in the use of the formal out of Court Caution. More analysis was needed to establish if Cautions were being displaced by informal Community Resolution, or if there was another explanation. There was no indication if this pattern was an intended outcome, but it potentially demonstrated a drive towards police-only sanctions at the out of Court level. Linked to Strategic Recommendation 2, a public conversation was needed about this.

<sup>77</sup> Figure copied from PSNI, *Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015-16 to 2023-24* associated Figure 2.2. available at [Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015/16 to 2023/24](#)

**Table 1: Informal and Formal Out of Court Sanctions for Drugs, Theft, Violence Against the Person (VAP) Offences and Offences with a Domestic Motivation recorded, 2015-16 and 2023-24.<sup>78</sup>**

	2015-16		2023-24		Swing to informal 2015-16 to 2023-24
	Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal	
<b>Drug offences</b>	19.1%	21%	33.7%	6.5%	+14.6 percentage points (pp)
<b>Theft offences</b>	4.5%	5.7%	8.1%	1.9%	+3.6pp
<b>VAP</b>	3.3%	2.4%	4.6%	1.1%	+1.3pp
<b>Domestic motivation</b>	1.9%	2.2%	2.9%	1%	+1pp

### Crimes with a hate motivation recorded

- 4.5 Use of out of Court disposals to resolve crimes with a hate motivation had varied. The PSNI outcome report noted that: *'this had been within the context of some of the hate motivations having low levels of crimes recorded;* and *'overall, for cases with a hate motivation recorded, outcomes mostly related to either evidential difficulties or to the investigation being completed with no suspect identified.'*
- 4.6 In 2023-24, informal out of Court disposals were used to resolve 4.1% of crimes with a motivation related to sexual orientation, 4.2% of crimes with a motivation related to faith/religion, 3.2% of crimes recorded with a racist motivation and 1.8% of crimes with a sectarian motivation (see Charts I to VI in Appendix 3). Community Resolution had not been issued for disability or transgender motivated hate crimes recorded in 2023-24 but this had varied over previous years. Charts showing the out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes recorded with a hate motivation from 2015-16 to 2023-24 are in Appendix 3.

### NIPB Performance Assessment

- 4.7 The 2023-24 NIPB annual assessment measured crime outcomes against baseline values. It concluded that its overall indicator for levels of effective crime outcomes was partially achieved, *'Effective crime outcomes are considered those which result in either a charge/summons or out of court, with the aim of increasing this rate. In the rolling 365 days to 31 December 2023, the outcome rate for Charge/Summons/Out of Court for all crime increased when compared to both the 2021-2022 and 2022-23 financial years and the baseline.'*

<sup>78</sup> Data taken from Police Crime outcomes in Northern Ireland 2015-16 to 2023-24 Table 2.2.

**Table 2: Crime Outcomes presented in the NIPB Annual Assessment 2023-24<sup>79</sup>**

2015-16 to 2019-20 Five Year Average for each Outcome Type – All Crime %				
Crime Outcome	Baseline Value Varies	2021-2022 Financial Year	2022-2023 Financial Year	Dec 2022- Nov 2023
Charge/Summons	17.2 (16.8-17.5)	14.9	15.9	18.6
Out of Court	6.6 (6.3-6.9)	6.8	7.0	7.9
Evidential difficulties (victim does not support)	17.8 (15.9-19.8)	18.5	20.8	23.7
Evidential difficulties (victim supports)	7.8 (5.2-10.4)	9.0	6.8	7.4
Other	1.4 (1.3-1.6)	1.1	1.1	1.1
Investigation complete – no suspect identified	31.9 (26.6-37.2)	20.3	20.0	21.4

4.8 Achieving a lower attrition rate (in respect of evidential difficulties due to the victim not supporting the case) had not been achieved. Also notable was that outcome measures related to victims' satisfaction in policing reported in the annual assessment of the Policing Plan 2020-2025 had decreased, for example:

**Extract from the Policing Plan 2020-2025 and Annual Performance Plan 2022-23 Annual Assessment, measure 2.2.1: Number of victims and service users who are satisfied with the service they have received.**

- 83.9% of victims agreed/strongly agreed that the Police Officers/staff treated them with fairness and respect, this has decreased compared to 86.8% in the last report card in May 2023;
- 55.4% of victims were very satisfied/satisfied with how well they were kept informed of the progress of their case, this has decreased compared to 58.6% in the last report card in May 2023;
- 65.2% of victims were very satisfied/satisfied with the service they received from the PSNI, this has decreased compared to 70.2% in the last report card in May 2023; and
- 76.8% of victims agreed/strongly agreed that if a family member or friend was victim of crime, they would recommend that they would report it to the PSNI, this is has decreased compared to 79.8% in the last report card in May 2023

4.9 This was a reminder that crime outcome rates were only one aspect of performance measurement, and a full assessment of whether police disposals were an effective crime outcome required a holistic evaluation taking account of a broader suite of measures.

<sup>79</sup> NIPB, Annual Performance Plan Assessment 2023-24, August 2024 available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2024-09/Annual%20Performance%20Plan%202023-2024%20-%20Draft%20%20%28002%29.pdf>

## COMMUNITY RESOLUTION OUTCOMES BY PSNI DISTRICTS

4.10 PSNI official data included police recorded crimes and sanction outcomes by type of disposal and Police District for each calendar year were as follows:

**Table 3: Community Resolution outcomes by Police District\***

Policing District	Police recorded crime		Sanction outcome (rates %)				Sanction outcomes (numbers)			
			All sanction outcomes <sup>1</sup>		Community Resolution <sup>2</sup>		All sanction outcomes <sup>1</sup>		Community Resolution <sup>2</sup>	
	Dec'22 - Nov'23	Dec'23 - Nov'24 <sup>4,5</sup>	Dec'22 - Nov'23	Dec'23 - Nov'24 <sup>4,5</sup>	Dec'22 - Nov'23	Dec'23 - Nov'24 <sup>4,5</sup>	Dec'22 - Nov'23	Dec'23 - Nov'24 <sup>4,5</sup>	Dec'22 - Nov'23	Dec'23 - Nov'24 <sup>4,5</sup>
Belfast City	34,584	32,152	29.0	28.1	6.0	5.4	10,040	9,036	2,079	1,748
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	6,127	5,610	33.8	32.2	8.0	8.6	2,072	1,796	491	479
Ards & North Down	6,689	5,654	31.3	31.0	7.3	6.5	2,096	1,752	487	365
Newry, Mourne & Down	9,235	7,847	33.5	33.1	7.5	7.2	3,094	2,591	689	566
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	10,364	9,020	34.8	32.4	7.5	6.8	3,611	2,922	779	613
Mid Ulster	5,162	4,642	38.1	37.3	9.2	9.5	1,969	1,724	477	441
Fermanagh & Omagh	4,518	3,967	39.5	41.9	10.5	12.0	1,784	1,658	475	475
Derry City & Strabane	11,285	10,218	30.1	30.0	5.5	5.4	3,396	3,042	624	549
Causeway Coast & Glens	6,252	5,617	32.5	30.4	7.4	6.3	2,033	1,698	463	353
Mid & East Antrim	6,506	6,013	35.4	36.2	8.9	7.8	2,306	2,163	579	467
Antrim & Newtownabbey	7,245	6,547	32.9	31.8	9.1	8.3	2,381	2,069	656	537
Northern Ireland	107,967	97,310	32.2	31.4	7.2	6.8	34,782	30,451	7,799	6,593

Table Fn.4 Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as records from 1 April 2024 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication in May 2025.

Table Fn5 Individual policing districts relating to Police recorded crime may not add to Northern Ireland total as there will be some crimes yet to complete the validation process and be allocated to a policing district.

\*Extract from Police recorded crimes and sanction outcomes by type of disposal and policing district, rates% and numbers Period Ending 30 November 2024 Table 12

4.11 This showed variation in the number and rate of CRNs used by District. Fermanagh and Omagh had the highest rate of Community Resolution to resolve crimes recorded within the District and the highest sanction outcome rate overall. Belfast City had the lowest rate of CRNs to resolve crimes within its area and the lowest overall sanction outcome rate overall. Use across most Districts had decreased in 2023-24. It was not apparent how this information was being used to drive evaluation or understand CRN use strategically either through PSNI accountability structures or the Out of Court Disposals Working Group. With oversight by the Criminal Justice Branch and the operationalisation of the Guidance, there was scope to develop this.

## MEASURING CRN EFFECTIVENESS AND QUALITY

### Reoffending

- 4.12 Reoffending outcomes for recipients who had received a CRN were not available. Anecdotally, it was considered an effective option in some cases and Officers discussed incidents that had clearly been a 'one-off' and the individual had not come to police attention again. While there were many factors at play in reducing reoffending, there were other examples cited in which CRNs appeared not to have reduced offending behaviour.
- 4.13 The Criminal Justice Branch was keen to understand the impact on reoffending and had been open to exploring options for research. Due to lack of funding this had not been feasible at the time of inspection. An objective within the PSNI Guidance included: *'to provide a proportionate justice disposals for suspects with little or no previous offending history, to reduce the impact on their lives compared to other non-Court disposals and encourage them to change their behaviour and not re-offend.'*
- 4.14 The YJA used internal management information to track referrals to its services. Of the 1,174 children who completed a CRN programme during 2022-23 it reported only 7.6% received a statutory referral to the YJA within one year of completion. Although not official statistics, it helped build a picture of youth justice system contact after completing a CRN and was possibly an approach from which the PSNI could learn.

### Victim satisfaction

- 4.15 The PSNI had not disaggregated its victim satisfaction survey data to ascertain feedback from victims where the case had been resolved by a CRN specifically. The YJA had also not disaggregated its survey data on satisfaction rates in this way but was open to exploring if this was feasible. The Northern Ireland Victim and Witness Survey data was drawn from the PPS case management system and therefore would not have included cases resolved by CRN.
- 4.16 A key objective within the PSNI Guidance had been to *'improve the involvement and quality of service provided to victims...'* and *'increase victim satisfaction in policing and criminal justice by providing a comparatively prompt and tailored resolution.'* The PSNI had begun exploring the potential for Victim Support Northern Ireland to assist in understanding victims' experiences of a CRN, which was crucial and positive that the Criminal Justice Branch was committed to progressing this.

### Resolutions

- 4.17 The availability and types of resolutions to resolve offending through a CRN were not monitored. Other than internal data related to the CBRJ Pilot and YJA CRN programmes (which was monitored by the YJA), the PSNI was unable to ascertain how many cases were resolved by way of apology, a programme or other means. The impact of resolution type on reoffending or victim satisfaction was not known.

Identification of programmes, gaps in availability and benefits for victims and recipients was an area that the Out of Court Disposals Working Group indicated it was interested to develop. Scoping out the potential to support stakeholder organisations in the development and delivery of programmes was also an important area for development.

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within one year of report publication, the Criminal Justice Board Out of Court Disposals Working Group should undertake an examination of the quality of Community Resolution Notice outcomes to include reoffending, victim satisfaction and effectiveness of resolutions. This information should drive planning for the availability of effective and proportionate programmes and be used effectively by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to inform Districts how well Community Resolutions are working in their area. An evaluation of the Community Based Restorative Justice Community Resolution Pilot should be included with a view to identifying and addressing any barriers to referrals.

## SPEEDING UP JUSTICE

- 4.18 Indicators to measure if CRN expansion had removed 'a significant number of low level cases from the formal criminal justice system,' reduced PSNI and PPS demand and freed resource for 'more serious criminal cases' were not available. As already discussed, the Out of Court Disposals Working Group needed to set this direction. While premature for the longitudinal impact of CRN expansion to be assessed, the Criminal Justice Branch had begun tracking monthly numbers to compare with CRNs issued in the previous year.
- 4.19 It reported that the number of CRNs completed in April 2024 to October 2024 (4,330 CRNs) decreased compared to the same period in 2023 (5,519 CRNs).<sup>80</sup> Several factors were surmised including the 'No File Decision' project, introduced in November 2023. This project authorised Officers to take a No File Decision where no prosecution was recommended on a file without direction from the PPS provided certain conditions, safeguards and offence criteria were met. The possibility was suggested that the revised CRN Guidance had enhanced clarity about use and Officers understanding of when an investigation could be closed, which meant perhaps that cases in which Officers had previously used a CRN were being submitted for 'No File Decision'. In practice, there should not have been overlap between these two types of outcomes, 'No File Decision' being for cases in which no further action would be taken and a CRN for diversion from the formal criminal justice system.

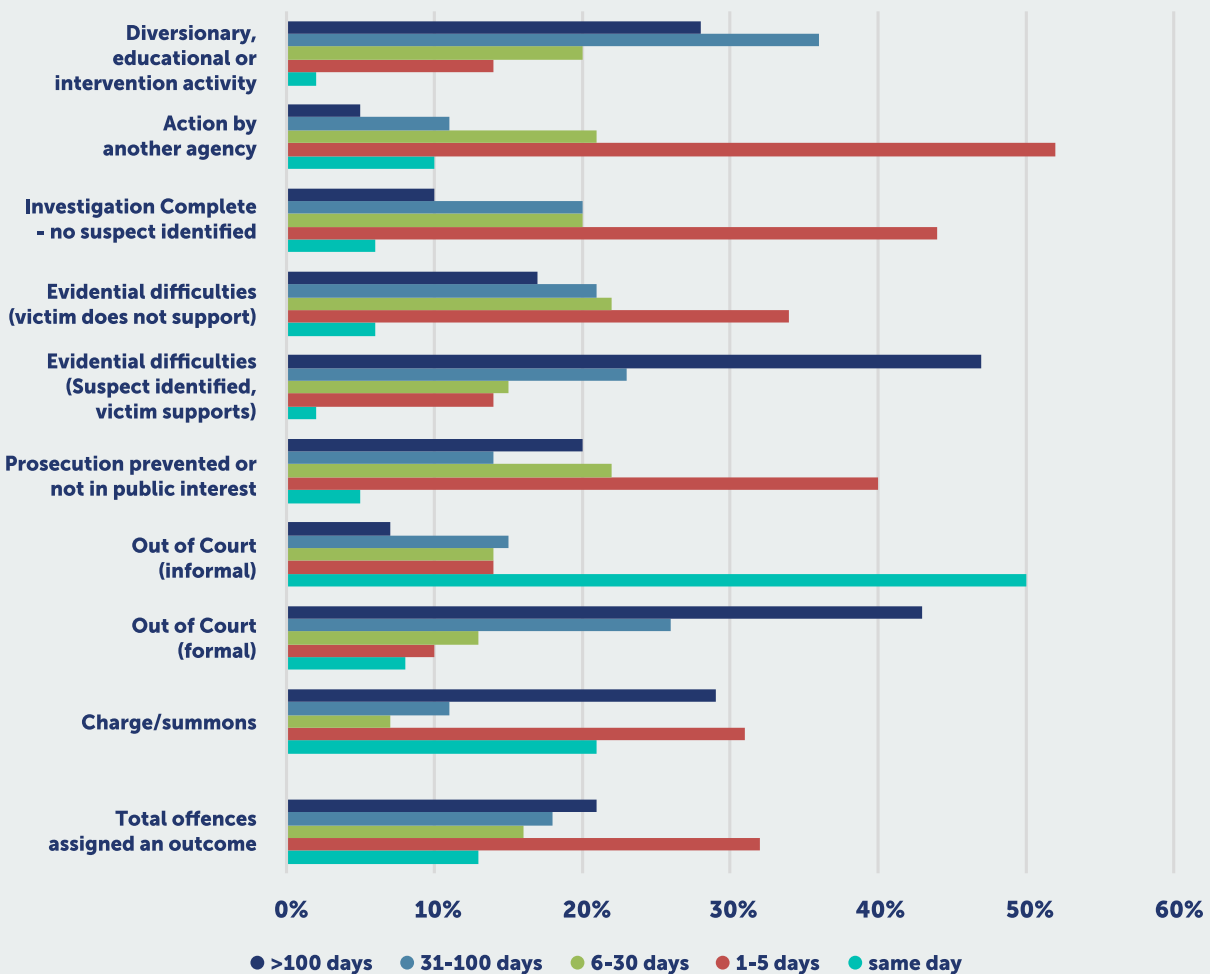
<sup>80</sup> PSNI Management Information taken from *PSNI, CRN and PND Data report 28 November 2024 – Internal report for the Out of Court Disposals Workstream of the Criminal Justice Board*.

4.20 Increased awareness of criteria and offences for a CRN as a result of compliance testing was also being considered as an explanation for decreased CRN numbers, as well as any change in offending patterns meaning offences had been outside scope. It was positive that monthly reports and queries had been raised although longitudinal data would be needed to establish trends. Direction from the Out of Court Disposals Working Group on the suite of measures needed to steer this would be important.

## LENGTH OF TIME FOR AN OUTCOME

4.21 Providing a prompt and timelier resolution was a key objective of the Guidance. In half of cases dealt with by informal out of Court disposal, the matter was resolved on the same day (Figure 10).<sup>81</sup> This was the highest rate of 'same day' resolution across all outcomes assigned to crimes in 2023-24.

**Figure 10: Length of time between offence reported to police and outcome assigned by outcome group 2023-24, percentage**



81 PSNI, Police Crime outcomes in Northern Ireland 2015-16 to 2023-24, Table 3.2.

## Future Direction for Effective Community Resolution

- 4.22 Out of Court disposals were used by Police forces in England to divert people from the criminal justice system and positive initiatives designed to achieve this had at times been highlighted by HMICFRS in its inspections of forces' effectiveness.<sup>82</sup> In 2018, HMICFRS had reported that *'[e]ncouragingly, the proportion of crime investigations which result in a positive outcome (charge, summons or out of court action) in Northern Ireland remains higher than the rate in England and Wales.'*<sup>83</sup> CRNs had been part of achieving this positive criminal justice outcome.
- 4.23 At the same time, vigilance was required particularly when Community Resolution was used mostly for drugs offences, an offence type for which the available resolutions were least relevant, and when the PSNI had expanded CRNs to include circumstances that the NPCC Guidance had explicitly excluded. Strategic direction and more transparency on the outcomes intended as a result of the already well-established programme of work to expand out of Court disposals, and robust evaluation of the effectiveness of Community Resolution both in terms of increasing victim satisfaction and reducing offending, was needed.

82 See for example HMICFRS, *Cambridgeshire PEEL (Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy) Assessment 2023-2025* available at <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/peel-reports/cambridgeshire-2023-25/>.

83 HMICFRS, *PEEL: Police Efficiency and Effectiveness 2018 – Police Service of Northern Ireland*, 2 November 2018, available at <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/peel-police-efficiency-and-effectiveness-2018-police-service-of-northern-ireland/>.

# APPENDIX 1: OUTCOMES ASSIGNED TO CRIMES RECORDED BY THE PSNI 2025-16 TO 2023-24

**Table 5 Outcomes that have since been assigned to crimes recorded 2015-16 to 2023-24 (shown as a percentage of total offences)**

Outcome group & type <sup>1</sup>	Percentage of crimes assigned each outcome type								
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
<b>Charge/summons</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>21.5</b>
<b>Taken into consideration</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
<b>Out of Court (formal)</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Juvenile caution	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5
Adult caution	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.0	1.1
Penalty Notice for Disorder	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
<b>Out of Court (informal)</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>7.2</b>
Community Resolution	4.0	4.1	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.9	6.4	7.1	7.2
<b>Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.4</b>
Offender died before proceedings	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
No prosecution directed (not in the public interest, PPS)	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Prosecution prevented - suspect under age	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Prosecution prevented - suspect too ill	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Prosecution prevented - victim/key witness dead/too ill	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Prosecution time limit expired	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>24.8</b>
Evidential difficulties: suspect not identified; victim does not support further action	1.0	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.5	2.1	3.2	2.9
Evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim does not support further action	17.5	19.2	20.1	17.7	19.8	20.8	22.1	22.5	22.0
<b>Investigation complete - no suspect identified</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>23.5</b>
<b>Action undertaken by another body/agency</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>Diversionsary, educational or intervention activity</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>Total offences that have since been assigned an outcome</b>	<b>98.8</b>	<b>98.5</b>	<b>95.8</b>	<b>93.2</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>93.5</b>	<b>92.6</b>	<b>91.2</b>	<b>88.5</b>
<b>Offences not yet assigned an outcome</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>11.5</b>
<b>Total offences %*</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Excluding Action Fraud

Table copied from Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015/16 to 2023/24 associated table 1.1 available at [Outcomes of Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2015/16 to 2023/24](#)

## APPENDIX 2:

# OFFENCES ELIGIBLE FOR COMMUNITY RESOLUTION NOTICES

(List copied from Internal PSNI Operational Guidance August 2024)

## COMMUNITY RESOLUTION NOTICE – AUTHORISED OFFENCES

### Attempts/threats to commit and aid and abet to the below offences included.

- Allowing an animal to wander.
- Attempted abstracting electricity (magnet on meter etc).
- Arson - up to £300 (excl. endangering life Art 3 (1) & (3) Criminal Damage (NI) Order 1977).
- Assault, resist or obstruct police.
- Begging.
- Burglary non-dwelling.
- Behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace.
- Common assault.
- Consume or purchase intoxicating liquor in a place other than a private house when under 18.
- Counterfeit Currency – up to £100.
- Criminal Damage – up to £300.
- Dishonestly using electricity - up to £300.
- Disorderly behaviour (incl. on licensed premises).
- Drunk in a public place.
- Fireworks offences.
- Fraud (S1 fraud, S2 fraud by false rep, S6 poss. of articles for use in fraud & S11 obtaining services dishonestly) – up to £300 involving one transaction only.
- Going Equipped for theft.
- Handling Stolen Goods.
- Harassment provided; course of conduct proved; \*\* REMEMBER STALKING LEGISLATION – F.O.U.R\*\*
- Indecent behaviour – limited to street urination, 'mooning' and 'streaking' provided no intent to cause alarm or distress.
- Liquor licensing/licensed premises offences:
  - Consuming Intoxicating liquor while a Minor;
  - Purchasing intoxicating liquor for a Minor;
  - Selling intoxicating liquor outside hours; and
  - Minor in Licensed Premises representing himself as 18 years of age.
- Making Off Without Payment - up to £300 (excluding 'drive offs').
- Possession of Drugs (only the named drugs and quantity limits shown are suitable).

## Class A

- DMT – N, N-Dimethyltryptamine – 5g.
- Cocaine – 5g.
- 34 Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA powder) – 5g.
- 34 Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA tablets/Ecstasy) – 10 tablets.
- Methamphetamine – 5g.
- Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) – 10 doses.
- Magic mushrooms – 5g.

## Class B

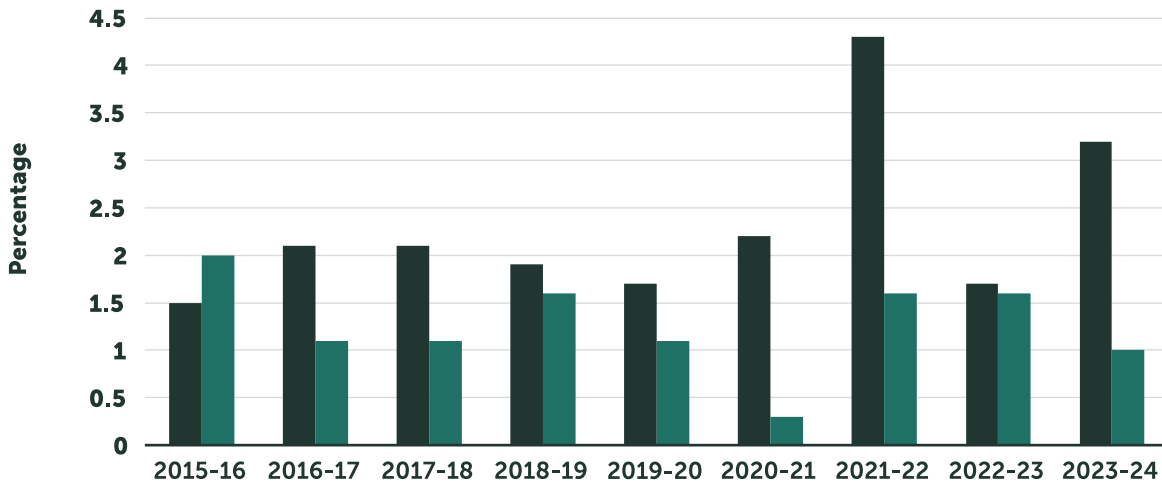
- Cannabis – 30g – All types.
- THC Edibles – 1 packet to a maximum of 30g.
- THC Vape – 5 vials.
- Butane hash oil/shatter/budder other similar derivative – 5g.
- Cannabis cultivation – 5 plants.
- Khat – 28g.
- Ketamine – 7g.
- Amphetamine – 7g.
- Mephedrone – 7g.

## Class C

- Diazepam (or other benzodiazepine) – 28 tablets.
- Alprazolam (Xanax) – 28 tablets.
- Pregabalin/Gabapentin – 28 tablets.
- Zopiclone – 28 tablets.
  
- Sending of false communications Section 179 of The Online Safety Act 2023.
- Sending letters etc. with intent to cause distress or anxiety - Art 3 Malicious Communications (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.
- Threatening Communications Section 181 of The Online Safety Act 2023.
- Theft (including theft employee) - up to £300.
- Vehicle Interference/Tampering.
- Wasting police time (excluding rape, domestic and sexual offence allegations).
- Wrongfully entering premises.

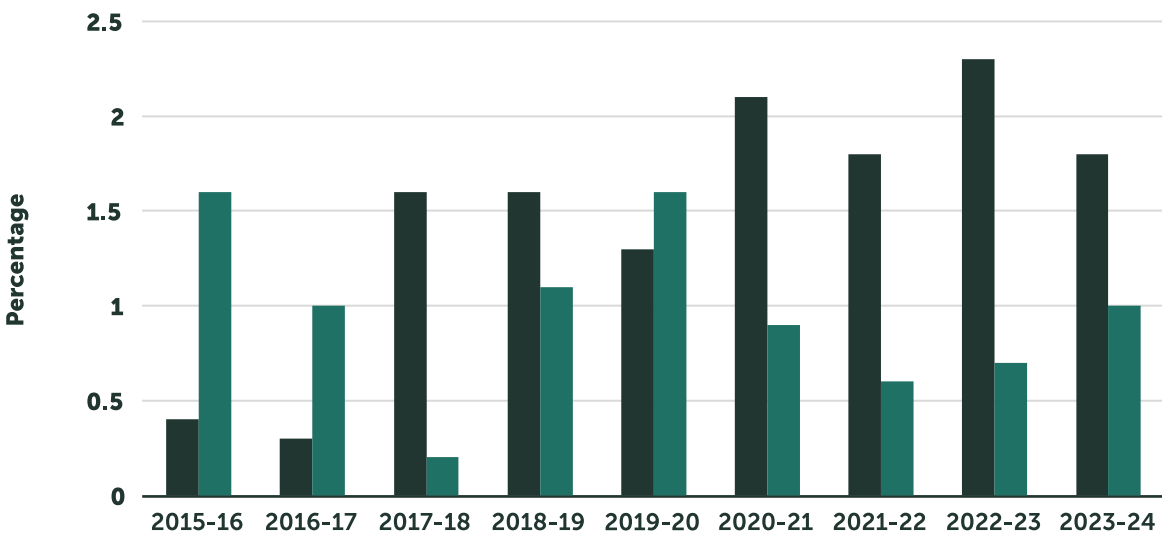
## APPENDIX 3: OUT OF COURT OUTCOMES ASSIGNED TO CRIMES RECORDED WITH A HATE MOTIVATION 2015-16 TO 2023-24 (SOURCE: PSNI)<sup>84</sup>

**Chart I: Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes with a hate motivation recorded (Racist) 2015-16 to 2023-24 (Source: PSNI)**



● Out of Court (Informal)	1.5	2.1	2.1	1.9	1.7	2.2	4.3	1.7	3.2
● Out of Court (formal)	2	1.1	1.1	1.6	1.1	0.3	1.6	1.6	1

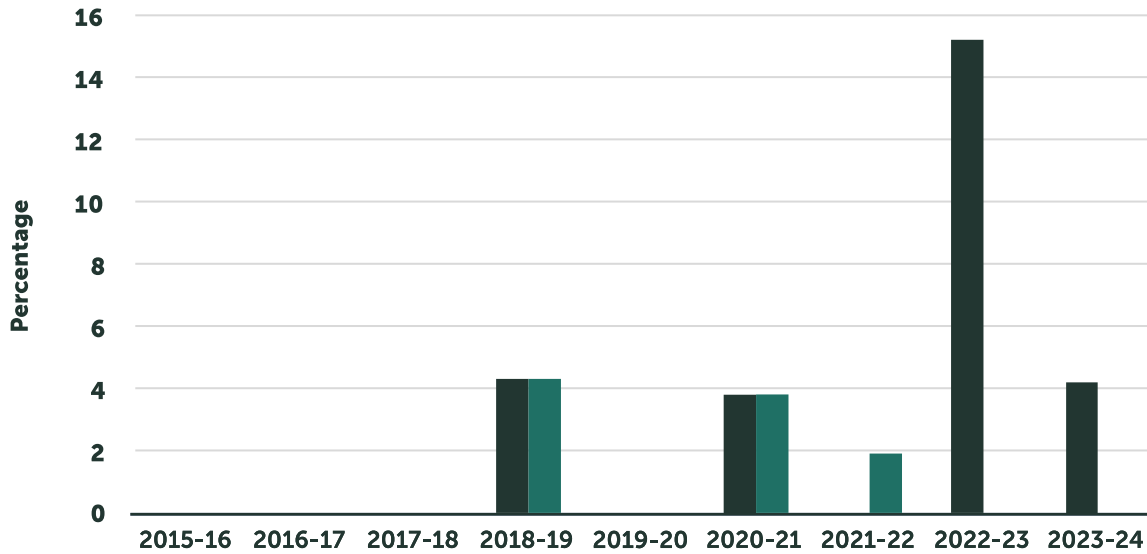
**Chart II: Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes with a hate motivation recorded (sectarian) 2015-16 to 2023-24 (Source: PSNI)**



● Out of Court (Informal)	0.4	0.3	1.6	1.6	1.3	2.1	1.8	2.3	1.8
● Out of Court (formal)	1.6	1	0.2	1.1	1.6	0.9	0.6	0.7	1

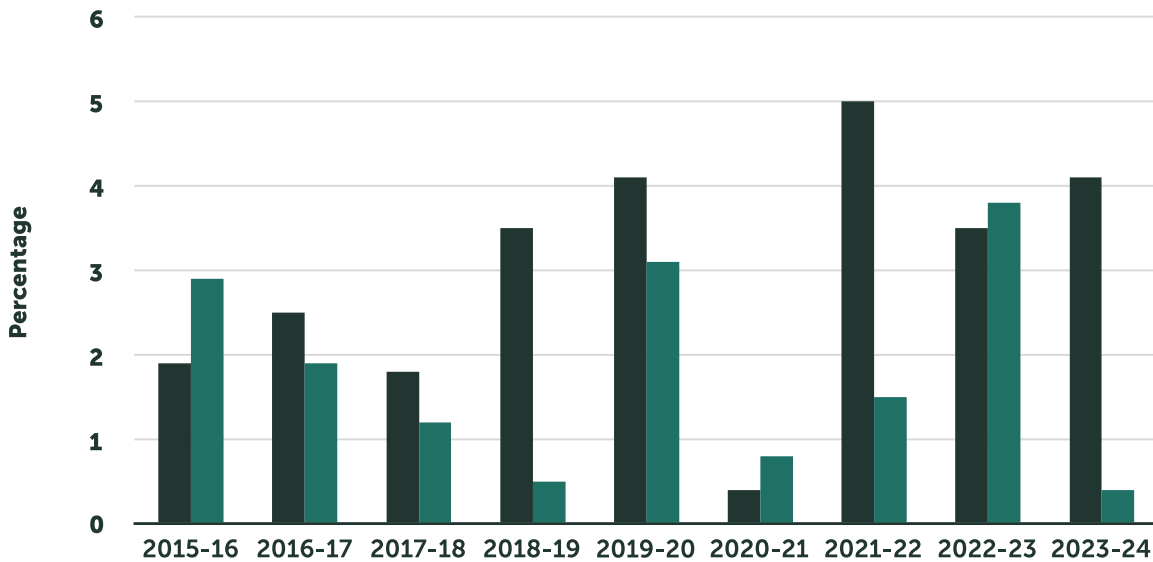
84 Available at [Police Recorded Crime Statistics | PSNI](#)

**Chart III: Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes with a hate motivation recorded (faith/religion) 2015-16 to 2023-24 (Source: PSNI)**



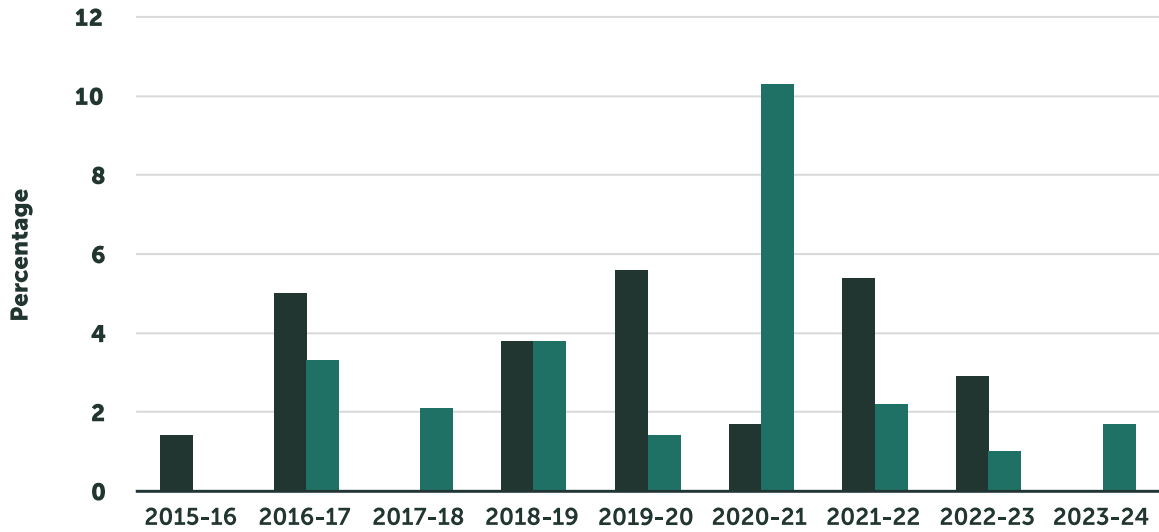
● Out of Court (Informal)	0	0	0	4.3	0	3.8	0	15.2	4.2
● Out of Court (formal)	0	0	0	4.3	0	3.8	1.9	0	0

**Chart IV: Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes with a hate motivation recorded (sexual orientation) 2015-16 to 2023-24 (Source: PSNI)**



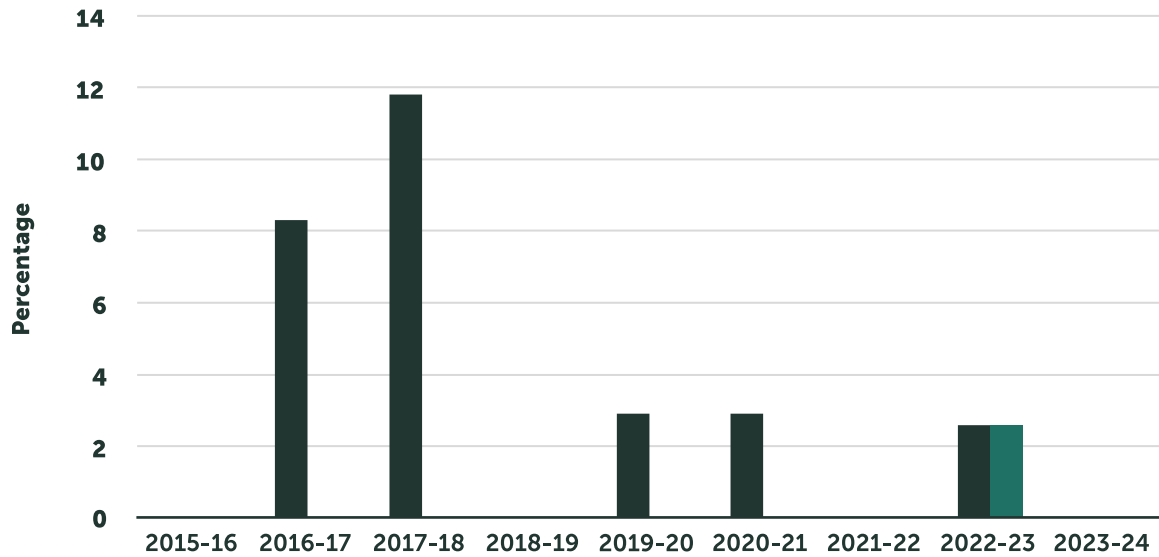
● Out of Court (Informal)	1.9	2.5	1.8	3.5	4.1	0.4	5	3.5	4.1
● Out of Court (formal)	2.9	1.9	1.2	0.5	3.1	0.8	1.5	3.8	0.4

**Chart V: Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes with a hate motivation recorded (disability) 2015-16 to 2023-24 (Source: PSNI)**



● Out of Court (Informal)	1.4	5	0	3.8	5.6	1.7	5.4	2.9	0
● Out of Court (formal)	0	3.3	2.1	3.8	1.4	10.3	2.2	1	1.7

**Chart VI: Out of Court outcomes assigned to crimes with a hate motivation recorded (transgender) 2015-16 to 2023-24 (Source: PSNI)**



● Out of Court (Informal)	0	8.3	11.8	0	2.9	2.9	0	2.6	0
● Out of Court (formal)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.6	0

## APPENDIX 4: METHODOLOGY

### DESKTOP RESEARCH AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Inspectors completed documentary analysis and met with a range of stakeholder organisations either during scoping or as part of the inspection to help inform this approach. The Terms of Reference were published on the CJI website.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENT REVIEW

The PSNI was invited to complete a self-assessment against the CJI Inspection Framework outlining the strategy and governance, delivery and outcomes in relation to the use of CRNs. The DoJ, the PPS and the YJA also provided information. All of this material was reviewed and used to inform the fieldwork plan and discussion areas for the inspection.

### FIELDWORK

Fieldwork with the PSNI Included:

- Constables Focus Group Belfast District x 2;
- Sergeants Focus Group Belfast District x 1;
- Inspectors Focus Group Belfast District x 1;
- Constables Focus Group Fermanagh and Omagh District x 1;
- Sergeants Focus Group Fermanagh and Omagh District x 1;
- Inspectors Focus Group Fermanagh and Omagh District x 1;
- Probationer Officer Training – observations x 1;
- Student Officer Training - observation x 1;
- Youth Diversion Officers – Focus Group x 1;
- Criminal Justice Branch Chief Inspector and Sergeant x 1; and
- Criminal Justice Branch Chief Superintendent x 1.

Fieldwork with the YJA:

- Interview with Assistant Director x 1.

Fieldwork with the PPS:

- Interview with Head of Policy and Information and PPS Prosecutors (CRN Quality Assurance Leads) x 1.

Fieldwork with the DoJ:

- Focus group x 1 (involving leads for the Out of Court Disposals Working Group and the Adult Restorative Justice lead).

### **File Review**

To supplement the evidence gathered for the inspection, CJI reviewed files based on a dip sample from a total of 668 CRNs issued over a one-month period in 2024 after the Revised Guidance was launched. Across these 668 CRNs issued, 72 were for children and the remainder for adults. A total of 53 were recorded as domestic abuse related and six had been flagged as hate related.

CJI Inspectors reviewed 29 cases. Of the files reviewed, a number involved an incident in which more than one person received a CRN for the offending; nine had a domestic motivation and out of these two involved intimate partners; five were hate motivated (on ground of race in two cases, sexual orientation in two cases, and sectarian in one case); and seven cases related to child suspects. Note that these subcategories do not add to the total 29 cases because some fell within more than one category, for example, a case involving a child suspect may also have recorded a hate element.

The question set for file review focused on supervisory oversight, including the level of authorisation and use of rationale, offence history, evidence of victim engagement and victim support, and resolutions agreed and completed. Within the sample, Community Resolutions in domestic abuse related cases, hate crime related cases and those involving child suspects were considered. The questions were shared with the Criminal Justice Branch for review. Following CJI's review of the files, several of the cases were checked with the Criminal Justice Branch Sergeant and CJI Inspectors jointly. This helped with learning and understanding gaps in recording.

## APPENDIX 5: TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Introduction

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) proposes to undertake an inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) use of Community Resolution Notices (CRNs).

CRNs were introduced as a non-statutory disposal available to the PSNI from 30 June 2016 and were the only informal 'out-of-court' outcome assigned to crimes recorded by the police in Northern Ireland. On 1 August 2024 arrangements for use were revised, which included adding additional offences to the authorised list for CRN disposal and amendments to the required levels of supervisor authorisation prior to issue.

The use and recent revision of CRNs by the PSNI was part of a broader approach, that included the Working Together Programme with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS),<sup>1</sup> to address avoidable delay, take lower-level offending out of the prosecution and court process and improve case progression within the criminal justice system. This was not unique to Northern Ireland with informal out-of-court community resolution available as a possible policing response to simplify and speed up justice across the United Kingdom. As an informal method for responding to crime, community resolution traditionally involved elements of restorative justice and was intended to achieve a proportionate response to certain levels of offending and more just outcomes for victims. Unlike a Caution, which was the main formal out-of-court disposal recorded by the PSNI, CRNs did not result in a criminal record.\*

Effective governance of the PSNI's use of CRNs to ensure fair and proportionate outcomes was imperative to their legitimacy. As with all exercises of discretion, appropriate safeguards and monitoring were required. Reflecting the true extent of intervention work required to deliver CRNs was also key. As the Prison Reform Trust had stated in evidence to the House of Commons Justice Committee, '*...proper diversion as opposed to simply ignoring low level offending is not cheap.*'<sup>2</sup>

### Context

There were 104,344 offences recorded by the PSNI in 2023-24 and 33,213 offences detected.<sup>3</sup> This was a sanction outcome rate of 31.8% and was the highest recorded since the data series commenced in 1998-99.<sup>4</sup> The majority of crimes with a sanction were dealt with by means of charge or summons followed by CRNs. The PSNI reported that compared to England and Wales '*twice as many of our cases are settled without going to court*' by, for example, community resolution with 9.1% out-of-court sanction outcomes in Northern Ireland compared to 3.95% in England and Wales.<sup>5</sup>

CRNs had increased from 3.9% of all outcomes assigned to crimes in Northern Ireland during 2015-16 to 7.2% in 2023-24. They represented the main out-of-court disposal increasing from half of all out-of-court sanctions (comprising Cautions, PNDs, and CRNs) in 2015-16 to almost four fifths in 2023-24.<sup>6</sup>

This continued a trend highlighted by CJI in its January 2015 inspection of the police use of discretion.<sup>7</sup> It noted that 'discretionary disposals,' rebranded as CRNs in June 2016, represented the main growth in alternatives to prosecution. While use of discretionary disposals had been higher than the PSNI originally envisaged, the inspection found that most cases were appropriate. Governance and quality assurance, however, was inconsistent. A main strategic recommendation called for review of the governance and management of all non-PPS disposals by the PSNI together with the PPS. Operational recommendations were made relating to consultation with Youth Diversion Officers, recording of decision-making processes, improved equity monitoring, guidance and continued monitoring through dip-sampling.

A CJI Follow-Up Review in 2021 found that the main strategic recommendation had been partially achieved.<sup>8</sup> Quality assurance methods required further development, as well as performance management information particularly the availability of reoffending data which had been limited. Six of eight operational recommendations were achieved. One recommendation, focused on the development of an electronic system for alternative disposals, was not achieved and there had been partial achievement of a recommendation for enhanced equality monitoring.

The most recent Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics showed that it delivered a total of 1,159 CRN programmes with educational sessions on topics such as drugs, alcohol, public order or criminal damage with new topic areas added as appropriate.<sup>9</sup> The YJA's involvement in the delivery of CRN programmes with children was considered in CJI's inspection of Youth Interventions.<sup>10</sup> While feedback from children and families about the support provided had been positive, better monitoring to understand patterns in CRN use and levels of work and interventions required was needed. A recommendation was made and accepted for the YJA, the PSNI and the PPS to agree an action plan to evaluate the approach to CRNs for children.

CJI was also aware that the PSNI had been reviewing its partnership arrangements for the delivery of CRNs. Its Criminal Justice Branch, in collaboration with criminal justice partners, had been designing a pilot scheme for delivery with accredited Community Based Restorative Justice organisations. Phase one of the pilot proposed that offending within the scope of a CRN would be considered for Restorative Justice referral. The PSNI has indicated that, *'This work, in the delivery of a pilot scheme, will contribute to delivering the recommendations outlined in [CJI's] 'Review of Community Restorative Justice Ireland and its Accredited Schemes.'*<sup>11</sup>

## Aims of the Inspection

The aims of the Inspection are to:

- examine the strategic and policy framework for CRNs and the strategic accountability mechanisms in place for their use and evaluation;
- review the effectiveness of CRN governance including recording, quality assurance, performance management and equality monitoring;
- examine the types and trends of offences CRNs are used for and any variations across PSNI Districts;
- examine the operational delivery of CRNs and effectiveness of supervisory oversight by the PSNI;
- assess progress against previous CJI recommendations;
- assess the effectiveness and accessibility of CRNs in delivering outcomes for victims and proportionate responses to offending;
- assess the availability and efficacy mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of CRNs in addressing offending behaviour;
- examine the effectiveness of partnership arrangements in the delivery of CRNs and mechanisms in place to ensure resource and funding adequately reflects CRN work being delivered;
- assess how the effectiveness of CRN use is benchmarked against international standards and good practice elsewhere; and
- any other matters arising during the inspection if considered appropriate by CJI may be included.

## Methodology

The inspection will be based on the CJI Inspection Framework for each inspection that it conducts. The three main elements of the inspection framework are:

- strategy and governance;
- delivery; and
- outcomes.

Constants in each of the three framework elements and throughout each inspection are equality and fairness, together with standards and best practice. The CJI inspection methodology can be found in The Inspection Process on our website.

## Design and Planning

### *Preliminary research*

Data and initial information has been reviewed in order to inform the inspection.

### *Benchmarking, research and data collection*

Collection of benchmarking information and data, where available, from other jurisdictions and sectors in Northern Ireland and a review of inspection and research reports will be undertaken.

### *Contact with agencies*

Terms of reference will be prepared and shared with the PSNI, the YJA and the PPS, as well as the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, prior to the initiation of the inspection. Liaison Officers from the organisations should be nominated for the purposes of the inspection.

## **Delivery**

### *Stakeholder consultation*

Interviews and focus groups will be conducted with relevant stakeholders to give an insight into the issues affecting the inspection.

### *Self-assessment*

The PSNI as the main organisation to be inspected will be asked to undertake a self-assessment which will be reviewed by CJI prior to undertaking fieldwork.

Other criminal justice organisations may be asked to undertake a self-assessment targeted towards their specific role in the delivery and/or governance of CRNs.

### *Development of fieldwork plan*

CJI will liaise with the inspection liaisons in each organisation to arrange a series of meetings and focus groups with relevant individuals and groups mostly within the PSNI and also within the YJA and the PPS. The DoJ, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships will also be consulted.

Inspectors will consider consultation with people who have received a CRN and victims if feasible and appropriate.

Case file reviews with the PSNI focused on the use of CRNs will be undertaken during fieldwork and planned with the PSNI inspection liaison.

### *Initial feedback to agencies*

On conclusion of the fieldwork the evidence will be collated, triangulated and analysed and emerging findings will be developed. CJI will then present the findings to the PSNI, the YJA, the PPS, the DoJ and the Northern Ireland Policing Board as appropriate.

### *Drafting of report*

Following completion of the fieldwork and analysis of data a draft report will be shared with the inspected bodies for factual accuracy check. The Chief Inspector will invite the inspected bodies to complete an action plan within six weeks to address the recommendations and if the plan has been agreed and is available it will be published as part of the final Inspection Report. The Inspection Report will be shared, under embargo, in advance of the publication date with the inspected bodies.

### **Publication and Closure**

A report will be sent to the Minister of Justice for permission to publish. When permission is received the report will be finalised for publication. A press release will be drafted and shared with the inspected agencies prior to publication and release. A publication date will be agreed and the report will be issued.

#### *Indicative Timetable*

Scoping/Research: September 2024.

Stakeholder consultation: October - November 2024.

Agency fieldwork: November - December 2024.

Draft Report to agencies: February 2025.

Factual accuracy feedback received: February - March 2025.

The above timetable may be impacted by factors outside CJI's control. The inspected organisations will be kept advised of any significant changes to the indicative timetable.

*\* Amendment 11/04/2025 to remove reference to Penalty Notices for Disorder, which did result in a criminal record.*

## ENDNOTES

- 1 PPS Annual Business Plan 2024-25 available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2024-07/PPS%20Annual%20Business%20Plan%202024-25%20%28002%29.pdf>.
- 2 House of Commons Justice Committee, *Children and Young People in Custody (Part 1): Entry into the youth justice system, Twelfth Report of Session 2019-21, 2 November 2020* available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3399/documents/32490/default/>.
- 3 Offences recorded are all those reported to police where the offence is within the Home Office notifiable offence list and where the Home Office National Crime Recording Standard and Counting Rules have been applied. Offences detected are those with a sanction outcome. 'Calculation Example, 111,571 crimes recorded during 2022-23 with 34,643 crimes detected by means of a sanction outcome and 67,716 crimes resulting in no formal action during 2022-23. This gives a sanction 'outcome rate' of 31.1% and an 'outcome rate' of 60.7% for crimes resulting in no formal action' (PSNI, *User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland, 24 November 2023* available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2023-11/Police%20Recorded%20Crime%20User%20Guide.pdf>)
- 4 See PSNI, *Police Recorded Crime Tables Period Ending 31st March 2024, Table 16A & 16B*, spreadsheet accompanying PSNI, *Police Recorded Crime Bulletin Period Ending 31st March 2024, published 16 May 2024* available at [Police Recorded Crime Bulletin Period Ending 31st March 2024.pdf \(psni.police.uk\)](https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/Police%20Recorded%20Crime%20Tables%20Period%20Ending%2031st%20March%202024.pdf). Also PSNI, *Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2022/23, 24 November 2023* available at [Trends In Police Recorded Crime 1998-99 to 2022/23 \(psni.police.uk\)](https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2023-11/Trends%20in%20Police%20Recorded%20Crime%201998-99%20to%202022-23.pdf).
- 5 PSNI, *Our Performance, Recent Highlights: Crime Rates in Northern Ireland, 16 August 2024* available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/our-performance>.
- 6 See PSNI, *Police Recorded Crime Tables Period Ending 31st March 2024, Table 16A & 16B*, spreadsheet accompanying PSNI, *Police Recorded Crime Bulletin Period Ending 31st March 2024, published 16 May 2024* as above.
- 7 CJI, *Police use of discretion incorporating Penalty Notices, January 2015* available at [Police Use of Discretion Incorporating Penalty Notices - CJI NI](https://www.cji-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2015-01/Police%20Use%20of%20Discretion%20Incorporating%20Penalty%20Notices.pdf)
- 8 CJI, *Police Use of Discretion Incorporating Penalty Notices – A follow-up review 18 February 2021* available at [Police use of Discretion incorporating Penalty Notices: A Follow-Up Review - CJI NI](https://www.cji-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Police%20Use%20of%20Discretion%20Incorporating%20Penalty%20Notices%20-%20A%20follow-up%20review.pdf)
- 9 NISRA, *Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Annual Workload Statistics 2023/24, T. Brown, 19 September 2024* available at [https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Youth\\_Justice\\_Agency\\_workload\\_statistics\\_2023-24.pdf](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Youth_Justice_Agency_workload_statistics_2023-24.pdf).
- 10 CJI, *Youth Interventions: An inspection of the Youth Justice Agency's Community Interventions, 5 September 2024* available at [Youth Interventions: An Inspection of the Youth Justice Agency's Community Interventions - CJI NI](https://www.cji-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/Youth%20Interventions%20-%20An%20inspection%20of%20the%20Youth%20Justice%20Agency's%20Community%20Interventions.pdf)
- 11 Northern Ireland Policing Board, *Written Question to the Chief Constable, Referrals made to restorative justice organisations, 01 February 2024, asked by Board Member Les Allamby* available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/questions/referrals-made-restorative-justice-organisations>; see also the CJI inspection: *CJI, Review of Community Restorative Justice Ireland and its Accredited Schemes, May 2023* available at [A review of Community Restorative Justice Ireland and its accredited schemes - CJI NI](https://www.cji-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/A%20review%20of%20Community%20Restorative%20Justice%20Ireland%20and%20its%20accredited%20schemes.pdf)



First published in Northern Ireland in October 2025 by

**Criminal Justice Inspection  
Northern Ireland**

Block 1, Knockview Buildings

Belfast BT4 3SJ

**[www.cjini.org](http://www.cjini.org)**



**Scan here to visit  
the CJNI Website**