



## KEY FACTS

# AN INSPECTION OF THE MANAGEMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

NOVEMBER 2025



## WHAT WAS THIS INSPECTION ABOUT?

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) makes independent and impartial decisions on prosecutions and prosecutes cases in all the criminal Courts in Northern Ireland on behalf of the public. The PPS needs to be, and needs to be seen to be, independent in its decision-making in individual cases.

The performance of the PPS impacts other criminal justice system organisations, defence representatives and the Judiciary and, importantly, victims, witnesses and defendants.

Organisational performance includes setting and measuring performance targets and activities, matching resources to demand, engaging and communicating, utilising staff skills and experience and demonstrating a culture of continuous improvement.



## HOW DID WE CARRY OUT THIS INSPECTION?

Before inspection fieldwork, the PPS provided a self-assessment of performance, which helped to inform the inspection scope. Inspectors reviewed and assessed a range of information and data. They also talked to the Director of Public Prosecutions and his Senior Team, Non-Executive Members, Assistant Directors, Senior Public Prosecutors, Public Prosecutors, Heads of Business/Units and Administration staff across the PPS. This involved a mix of in-person, video meetings and focus groups. Inspectors also did a walk-around in the Belfast office and spoke to staff there.

Inspectors met with key stakeholders, including the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Departments of Justice and Finance, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, the Lady Chief Justice's Office, Forensic Science Northern Ireland and representatives of both the Bar of Northern Ireland and the Law Society of Northern Ireland.

The main inspection themes were:

- the alignment of PPS's strategic plans to criminal justice system priorities;
- the effectiveness of PPS governance structures and accountability;
- the use of management information to inform and deliver improvements;
- the quality of leadership in fostering a performance focused culture;
- partnership working;
- the management and utilisation of resources;
- the measurement of performance outcomes; and
- continuous improvement practices.



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## WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?



**Strategic Direction:** The PPS has a clear long-term vision (*PPS 2030*) and annual business plans, but measuring progress against longer-term priorities was challenging.



**Governance:** The PPS's Management Board and supporting committees provided oversight, but there is scope to assess their effectiveness and improve the use of performance dashboards to better inform decision-making.



**Accountability:** Changes to current accountability arrangements should be explored to provide optimum representation and awareness of PPS corporate governance and performance in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The PPS should be more transparent about their performance and communicate it more widely.



**Delivery:** Budget pressures have impacted service delivery and transformation. Staffing relies heavily on temporary and agency staff, including barristers as substitutes for Prosecutors, with ongoing challenges in workforce planning and morale.



**Performance:** Case processing times remain lengthy and the volume of outstanding cases, especially in the Crown Court, is a concern. Backlogs in file allocations and delays in taking prosecution decisions persist.



**Partnerships:** Collaboration with the police and other criminal justice partners is critical, with joint initiatives underway to reduce avoidable delay, improve file quality, reform committal to the Crown Court and provide better services for victims and witnesses.



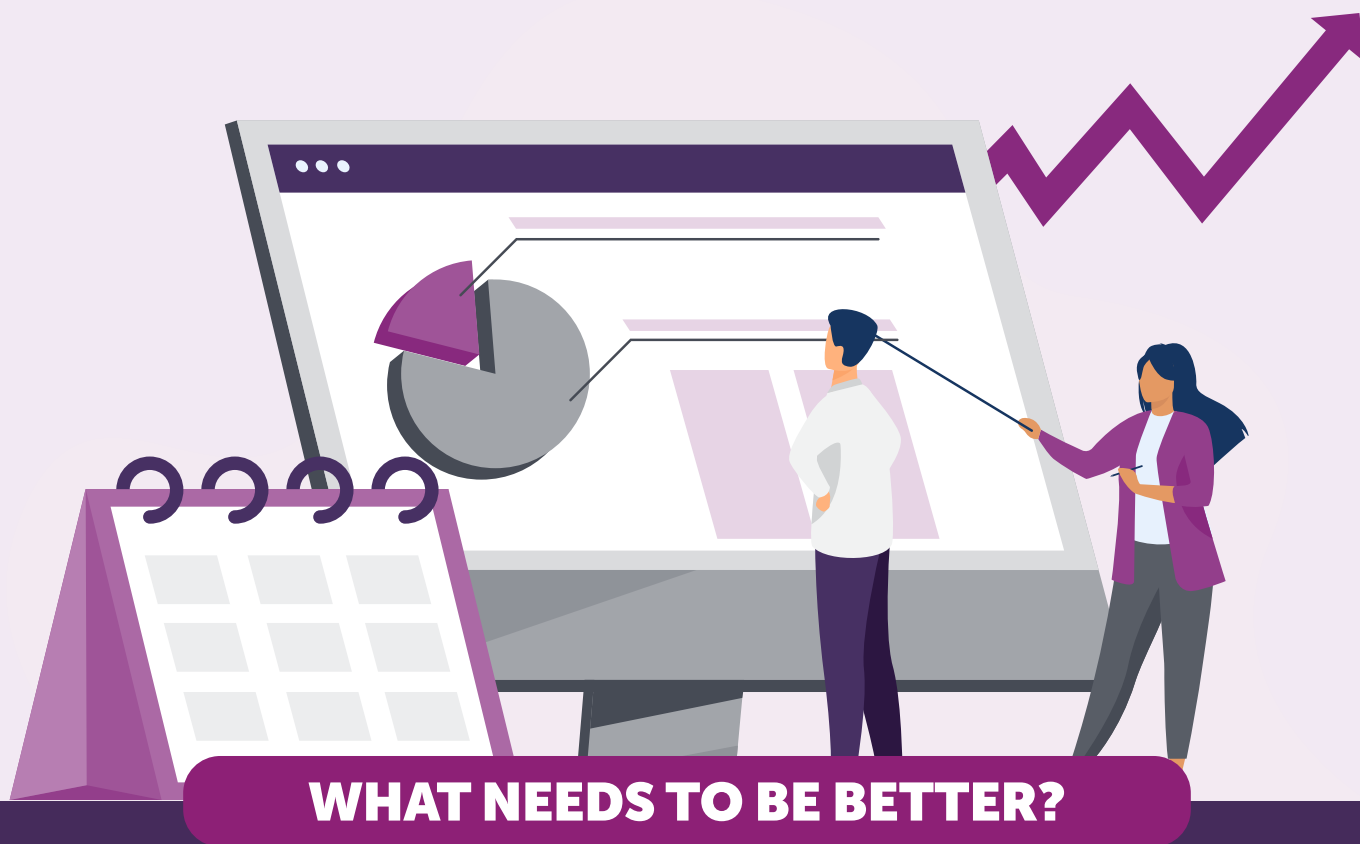
**Technology:** Progress on digital transformation is ongoing, with projects like electronic summons signing and remote evidence centres.



**Outcomes:** Only a minority of timeliness targets were met. A robust outcomes framework is needed to measure and demonstrate multi-year impacts.



**Quality of Service:** The Victim and Witness Care Unit faces challenges in meeting needs. Staff told Inspectors they felt detached from the rest of the PPS and had difficulties accessing case information.



## WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

### At a Strategic (leadership) level:

- Initiate discussions with the Attorney General and relevant Ministers on PPS representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Develop a Strategic Workforce Plan and complete a People Strategy, informed by improved demand modelling developed in partnership with the police.
- Develop and publish an Outcomes Framework aligned with *PPS 2030 vision*.

### At Operational (on the ground) level:

- Implement and utilise a new performance dashboard.
- Review reporting arrangements and operational committees to optimise the Senior Assistant Director Resource and Change role.
- Align opening budgets with projected settlements for justice organisations.
- Design and implement a Quality Assurance Framework to measure performance in the Courts, using both quantitative (cost) and qualitative data.



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## WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE NOW?

We want to see the accepted recommendations being fully implemented to enable improvements to PPS's management of organisational performance that support better outcomes across the criminal justice system and to help deliver its *PPS 2030 vision*.

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

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