



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

NOVEMBER 2025

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November 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.

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

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CJB	Criminal Justice Board
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
DoF	Department of Finance
DoJ	Department of Justice
DPP/Director	Director of Public Prosecutions
HMCPSP	His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (in England and Wales)
PfG	Programme for Government
PPS	Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland

CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

Independence and impartiality are cornerstones of public confidence in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (the Public Prosecution Service) and so too are assurances that organisational effectiveness, including the use of resources, is well managed and transparent.

We know that the effectiveness of the criminal justice system is only as good as how each part of it works together towards a shared vision and clear aims. We also know that the staff and business success of the Public Prosecution Service is heavily reliant on other parts of the criminal justice system, and perhaps most critically on the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to ensure professional relationships and interactions lead to quality service delivery at all levels in each organisation.

And yet openness and public awareness about the Public Prosecution Service's performance, accountability and the challenges it is facing is vastly different. Attention tends to be focused on high profile cases or individual decisions rather than how the organisation is providing efficient and effective services on our behalf throughout Northern Ireland. Communication channels and mechanisms that enable timely information and informed debate do not match the central and critical role the Public Prosecution Service has in our criminal justice system.

The Public Prosecution Service's staff are its greatest asset, who face the same complexities and challenges that require delivering business as usual in every Region while driving and implementing long overdue transformation towards reduced delay, better victim and witness support, more digital and less paper. Future organisational effectiveness relies on professional and committed Prosecutors and staff who feel part of one organisation, who, at every level, are clear about and committed to the Director of Public Prosecution's priorities and required quality standards and deliver them consistently across Northern Ireland.

This will require a Workforce Strategy that attracts, develops and retains Prosecutors who are effective in and out of Court, staff who are skilled and supported and who work with criminal justice system partners, defence representatives and victims and witnesses to deliver great services. It also means a relook at the use of Counsel and temporary agency staff, including as replacements for Public Prosecutors in Magistrates' Courts, to ensure the Public Prosecution Service workforce can meet future service demands and business needs.

This Inspection Report makes three Strategic and four Operational recommendations to support the Public Prosecution Service as it moves forward towards achieving its PPS 2030 ambitions and contributes to the current Programme for Government priorities for the criminal justice system including system wide transformation. The Department of Justice is currently creating a vision and priorities for the criminal justice system and, as a key Criminal Justice Board member, the Director of Public Prosecutions, his senior leaders and team will have a pivotal role in ensuring that action to achieve that vision is progressed in this Northern Ireland Assembly mandate and beyond.

Crucially, a Strategic Recommendation challenges the appetite to revisit the Public Prosecution Service's current governance and accountability arrangements with the relevant Ministers and the Attorney General and consider their fitness for purpose given the demands of our criminal justice system in the 21st century.

This could improve transparency and increase political and public awareness about the challenges the Director and his team are managing as well as service delivery achievements and successes; giving the Public Prosecution Service the exposure and voice in the Northern Ireland Assembly it deserves, and we will benefit from.

My thanks to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland senior leaders and staff from across the organisation who supported and engaged with the Inspection Team as well as all the stakeholders who contributed to this inspection.

I am also grateful to James Corrigan, Deputy Chief Inspector, who led this inspection supported by Inspectors Dr Claire Feehan and David MacAnulty.



Jacqui Durkin

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

November 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary role of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland has been to reach decisions on prosecutions, which must satisfy the Evidential and Public Interests Tests. It then prepares cases for Court and has responsibility for the conduct of prosecutions. The performance of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland impacts directly on other parts of the criminal justice system, particularly on efforts to reduce avoidable delay and improve services to victims and witnesses.

Managing organisational performance involves matching goals and objectives to outcomes, including an alignment with the Programme for Government and Department of Justice priorities.

It also includes the setting and measurement of performance targets and activities, matching resources to demand, engaging and communicating, utilising the skills and experience of its people and instilling a culture of continuous improvement.

STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland's long-term priorities have been outlined in its 'PPS 2030' Vision document with shorter term objectives and targets included in its annual Business Plans. Joint work with the Criminal Justice Board has been focused on the Speeding Up Justice programme, which has involved the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland taking a lead on the Early Engagement project and progressing the Working Together Programme with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. A successful bid to the Northern Ireland Executive Transformation Fund has provided renewed impetus and funding for expanding collaboration.

Governance and accountability structures for the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland have sought to balance the independence of the prosecution function with the need to promote joint working and support the necessary inter-dependencies to deliver an end-to-end criminal justice service to users. Separate funding arrangements for the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, through the Department of Finance, has not disadvantaged the organisation in terms of its baseline budget or access to additional in-year funding. There is merit in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland initiating discussions with the Attorney General and Executive Ministers to explore the representation of the affairs of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Management Board, which comprises the Director, Deputy Director, two Senior Assistant Directors and Non-Executive Members has been the executive decision-making body. It had been supported by a Senior Management Group, three Operational Committees and a Strategic Improvement Group. The Management Board has also been advised and supported by a Director's Review Meeting and the Audit and Risk Committee. A Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland commissioned report has found these structures to be fit for purpose,

though there is benefit in regularly reviewing the current structures to ensure best use of resources and time. The Management Board should also ensure that its investment in the senior Resource and Change role can be fully realised through the best alignment of legal and business functions and the delivery of its transformation projects. Making best use of management information to inform strategic decision-making can be improved by the operation of a performance dashboard.

DELIVERY

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland received a budget allocation of £44.3 million for 2024-25 – that increased to £46.3 million for 2025-26. It has faced significant budget pressures of between one and three million pounds in recent years, which has required in-year funding (mainly used to pay for increased use of Counsel in the Courts). The Director of Public Prosecutions has frequently raised his concerns on the under-funding of the organisation and its impacts on the delivery of current services as well as progressing transformational projects.

Increases to the baseline budget since 2023-24 and a successful bid to the Northern Ireland Executive Transformation Fund has allowed more vacancies to be filled as well as progressing plans to recruit more Senior Public Prosecutors. The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland had 410 permanent staff, 64 temporary staff and four seconded staff in 2024.

Longer-term planning will also need to be informed by the completion of work on a new Capacity Model, which can better match resources with workloads, as well as the greater use of demand modelling to project future caseload from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

One of the most striking trends over the past two decades has been the decrease in the number of files submitted to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. The organisation was originally structured and resourced to deal with over 50,000 files – it received 38,682 in 2024-25. The reasons for the decline, which has recently accelerated, can be linked to a reduction in crime reporting as well as concerted efforts by the criminal justice system to implement Out of Court disposals such as Community Resolution Notices and reduce Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland decision-making on files such as those with a Police Service of Northern Ireland recommendation of no prosecution (No File Decision pilot).

At the same time, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, Police Service of Northern Ireland and the legal professions have pointed towards increasing case complexity including serious cases, new legislation, commitments to victims and witnesses and the use of multi-media evidence, all of which requires more time and resources.

The average processing times for cases had continued to increase or had only marginally decreased, and this was particularly evident for cases in the Crown Court. Performance challenges in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, as well as the need for improved collaboration with partner organisations, have contributed to the slowness of the system. Backlogs in file allocations to Prosecutors, longer times to take prosecution decisions and frequent Court adjournments have all prolonged the prosecution stage of case progression. Achieving internal Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland timeliness targets became more problematic and increased frustration and concerns for senior leaders and staff across the organisation. The need to re-deploy staff from the Regions to deal with spikes in demand in specialist functions such as the Serious Crime Unit, helped to turn-around performance in one area at the expense of another. Using more temporary prosecution staff and Counsel to cover gaps had become part of the Service Delivery Model.

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should have a longer-term Strategic Workforce Plan and new People Strategy which should be informed by its new Capacity Model and expanded use of demand modelling. Short-term solutions, often necessitated by budget pressures and unexpected spikes in demand, have tested the resilience of senior leaders and staff across the organisation. There were many examples of frustrations and concerns expressed to Inspectors and evidence of lower staff morale and higher levels of sickness absence. More effective engagement and communication would help to address these concerns and the interfaces between the Management Board and the Assistant Directors needed attention as one of the key strategic relationships in the organisation. There was also a need to address the perceived remoteness of the Victim and Witness Care Unit, the importance of having readily accessible case information for those who are in contact with Prosecutors and better communication between the Victim and Witness Care Unit, Prosecutors and victims.

An internal review of administrative functions and processes was ongoing at the time of inspection and would also need to link into wider challenges such as the inefficiencies of archaic paper-based systems and the need to implement technology enabled improvements such as the electronic summons signing project. The roll out of Remote Evidence Centres has the potential to make better use of Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland resources and support to victims and witnesses.

OUTCOMES

The key outcome of the Speeding Up Justice programme had not delivered the required level of improvements by the criminal justice system and delays in the progression of Crown Court cases have continued to be unacceptable taking an average of 542 days in 2024-25. The causes of delay are spread across the system from investigation and prosecution up to completion in the Courts. Progress was also impeded by the absence of an end-to-end Statutory Time Limit or any specific time limit for key stages. Instead, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland have developed their own organisational timeliness targets with a focus on reducing the time to take prosecution decisions. It reported that just three of its timeliness targets were achieved in 2023-24, which included the time taken by Prosecutors to issue a decision. At 31 March 2024, there were over 6,500 files awaiting a prosecutorial decision, an increase of nearly a fifth over the previous 12 months.

Separately, the Department of Justice has produced more detailed quarterly reports of case progression from point of charge/ informed to disposal in the Courts which showed that close to 40% of the total time of a Crown Court charge case was spent in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland waiting for a decision.

Gaps in the oversight of Court performance presented a reputational risk to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, especially due to an increasing reliance on external Counsel as well as temporary prosecutor staff. Putting in place a means to better monitor, measure and report on performance in the Courts should be a priority for the Service.

Resource constraints have placed greater emphasis on developing arrangements to allow cases to be dealt with proportionately. Senior leaders, in conjunction with criminal justice partners, were attempting to reduce demands and the numbers of less serious cases and offences sent to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland had fallen but the benefits had been lower than anticipated. The level of resources deployed to deal with cases that did not proceed to trial, caused in large part to late guilty pleas, was higher than England and Wales. Much of this work on Court preparation was ultimately nugatory for the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.

The importance of having an Outcomes Framework, to measure progress and demonstrate success on its multi-year vision and priorities, was very apparent and necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

On publication of this report, the Director of Public Prosecutions should initiate discussions with the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and relevant Ministers on their representation of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland affairs in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Paragraph 2.20

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should commence a Strategic Workforce Plan and complete its People Strategy. It should be informed by improved demand modelling undertaken with the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 3.31

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should develop and publish an Outcomes Framework to measure and demonstrate the multi-year impacts of its services and activities in line with the Public Prosecution Service 2030 vision.

Paragraph 4.27

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should have successfully implemented and be effectively utilising a new and effective performance dashboard.

Paragraph 2.25

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should commence a review of the effectiveness of its reporting arrangements and operational committees and assure itself that the Senior Assistant Director Resource and Change role is optimised to support effective organisational performance.

Paragraph 2.36

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should work with the Department of Finance, as part of its engagement on a multi-year budget from 2026-27, to better align its opening budget to projected budget settlements for criminal justice system organisations funded by the Department of Justice.

Paragraph 3.4

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should design and implement a Quality Assurance Framework to measure performance in the Courts. The Framework should utilise quantitative (costs) and qualitative data to assess all aspects of the Service Delivery Model for its work in the Courts.

Paragraph 4.19

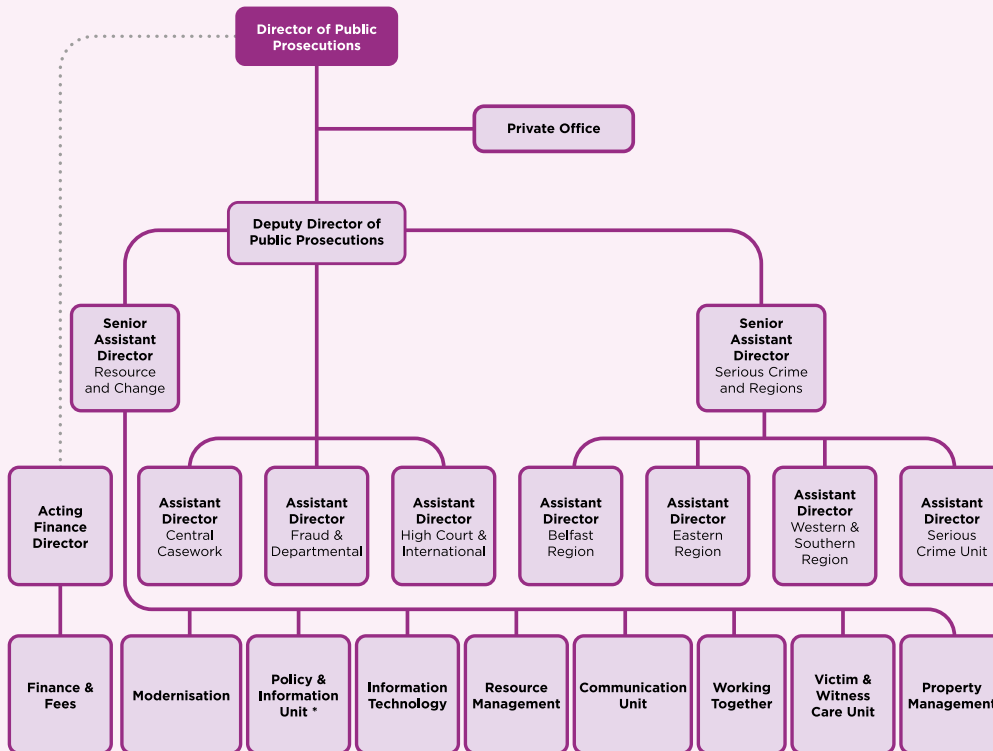
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THE REMIT AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

- 1.1 The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) was established in June 2005. The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (the 2002 Act) defined the PPS, its statutory duties and responsibilities, and the legislative framework within which it must provide its services. The Act ratified the recommendations of the Review of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, which was published in 2000 and addressed *'the arrangements for the organisation and supervision of the prosecution service, and for safeguarding its independence.'* The Review stated that the prosecutorial authorities should be independent of the Northern Ireland Executive. Prosecution decisions made by the PPS have been made without interference from criminal justice agencies, other parties or Government. They tempered the pursuit of independence by recognising that independence does not imply isolation or detachment from the rest of society or other criminal justice agencies.
- 1.2 The primary role of the PPS is to reach decisions to prosecute or not, while it also provides prosecutorial and pre-charge advice and has extended its ability to deal with offenders other than through prosecution including adult and restorative cautions, informed warnings, and youth conferencing. Prosecutions have been progressed where the Prosecutor is satisfied that the Test for Prosecution has been met, that includes the Evidential Test where there is a reasonable prospect of conviction and the Public Interest Test where a prosecution is required in the public interest. The PPS will then prepare cases for Court and have responsibility for the conduct of prosecutions.
- 1.3 Prosecutions in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts, and appeals to the County Court, can be conducted by PPS Prosecutors. The most serious offences are heard in the Crown Court. These cases are generally conducted by external Counsel. The use of external counsel forms a core part of the prosecution service in the Courts, particularly as plans to use in-house Higher Court Advocates to conduct Crown Court cases were not extended beyond a pilot phase. In 2019-20, 17% of Crown Court caseload was briefed to Higher Court Advocates and this fell to 13% in 2020-21 and 6% in 2024-25. The PPS stated that the use of Higher Court Advocates had not led to sufficient savings and just two remained in post in 2024-25.

- 1.4 Since the devolution of policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Assembly) in April 2010, the PPS has been designated as a non-ministerial government department and financed directly from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund through the supply process operated by the Department of Finance (DoF). Each year the PPS is given approval for its expenditure when the Assembly votes the Main Supply Estimates.

Figure 1: PPS Organisational Structure (March 2024)



*Includes Business Assurance and the Victim and Witness Care Unit

- 1.5 The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the Deputy Director posts were public appointments made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (Figure 1).¹ Both posts had the same powers, though the Deputy must exercise them subject to the DPP's direction and control. All other staff were members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. There were two Senior Assistant Directors (Senior Civil Service Grade 3s) responsible for Serious Crime and Regions and for Resources and Change. These four posts constituted the senior management team/leaders of the PPS.
- 1.6 The Deputy Director was responsible for Central Casework, Fraud and Departmental cases and High Court and International. Both Central Casework and Fraud involved high profile and difficult cases such as terrorism and organised crime. High Court and International involved specialist legal matters such as bail applications, restraint and confiscation orders, extradition, judicial reviews and cases referred by the Criminal Cases Review Commission.

1 The DPP was appointed in January 2018 and was the fourth DPP since the establishment of the post in 1972. The Deputy DPP was appointed in April 2018.

- 1.7 The PPS had operated a two-region model since 2015 (when it had moved from four regions), but in 2023 it had implemented a temporary arrangement of splitting the Belfast and Eastern region, with separate Assistant Directors (ADs, see Figure 1). The DPP confirmed that the PPS was moving to a three-region model in his foreword to the 2025-26 Business Plan. He stated that it would improve the alignment of staffing and workload demands across the regional offices.
- 1.8 The Senior Assistant Director for Serious Crime and Regions had responsibility for most prosecutions, which were taken in Belfast, Eastern and Western/Southern Regions. The Serious Crime Unit, which dealt with the most serious offences including murder, manslaughter, rape and other serious sexual offences, human trafficking, prostitution and related offences was part of the remit of the Senior Assistant Director.
- 1.9 The Senior Assistant Director for Resources and Change provided a range of professional, technical and other support services and had a staff complement of 110 at the time of fieldwork, which included the Victim and Witness Care Unit. It also included the Policy and Information Unit and a Strategic Improvement Team. The latter has provided a lead role for the PPS in respect of the day-to-day management of strategic criminal justice reform initiatives and related innovation projects.

ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

- 1.10 The focus of this inspection was on how well the PPS was doing to achieve its vision, priorities and targets and how this was governed and managed. Numerous studies and business models have reported on how best to measure and compare organisational performance, with consensus that key factors include:
- clarity of strategic direction;
 - setting goals and measuring them;
 - quality of leadership and engagement;
 - effective delivery partnerships (internally and externally);
 - allocation and deployment of resources (principally people); and
 - achievement of outcomes (stated results).
- 1.11 The methodology used by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) to assess the management of organisational performance was the same as other inspections – strategy and governance, delivery and outcomes. Prior to fieldwork, the PPS had completed a self-assessment and provided supporting information and data. Fieldwork comprised separate meetings with all senior leaders, focus groups across all legal and business areas and consultations with key stakeholders from October 2024 to January 2025. The Inspection methodology is outlined in Appendix 2.

CJI INSPECTIONS

- 1.12 CJI first inspected the PPS in 2007 to establish a baseline against which future developments could be judged.² It was the first time the organisation had been subject to a comprehensive operational inspection. CJI carried out a Follow-Up Review to the baseline inspection in 2009. An inspection of PPS corporate governance was published by CJI in 2013 that assessed how the organisation was directed and controlled, how it governed its activities and managed its performance and risk. In the foreword to that report, the then Chief Inspector stated that there was a *'need to introduce a more consistent approach to performance management and accountability'*. A Follow-Up Review of the PPS response to strategic inspection recommendations made between 2013 and 2015 was published in 2018 which stated the need for the PPS to constantly review and improve its performance in view of changing demands and challenges.
- 1.13 The performance of the PPS has also been inspected as part of a series of thematic inspections, most recently in *Transforming the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland* (2024), *File Quality, Disclosure and Case Progression and trial recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic* (2023), *the operation of Bail and Remand* (2023) and *The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland* (2020).

² All CJI Inspection and Follow-Up Review Reports are available on the CJI website available at: <https://www.cjini.org/reports/>

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

- 2.1 The Programme for Government (PfG) *'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'* for 2024-2027 was published in March 2025 with nine strategic priorities, one of which, *'Safer Communities'*, was most closely aligned with the criminal justice system and the work of the PPS.³ The PfG makes specific reference to drive forward a Speeding Up Justice Programme *'that includes getting the most serious cases to Court more quickly, looking at the jurisdiction of the Courts and enhanced digital capabilities to deliver efficiencies, and removing demand from the Court system, such as less serious motoring offences'*. It also included investments in digital capabilities to improve electronic communication between criminal justice organisations and with users including victims and witnesses. There is a reference to stabilise and then grow Police Officer numbers.
- 2.2 In relation to the PPS, there is a statement to achieve the *'necessary prosecution resources'*, though that was not quantified. The PPS submission to the earlier consultation on the draft PfG drew attention to the need to re-shape the criminal justice system to find more proportionate ways of dealing with less serious offending, to focus resources on more serious offences and help deliver key outcomes such as reducing offending and reoffending. The PfG stated that reducing offending and reoffending will be a focus of a new cross government strategy.
- 2.3 The PfG also had a priority of *'Ending Violence against Women and Girls'*, that included better support for victims of crime and more ways to hold perpetrators to account.
- 2.4 A cross-cutting PfG priority dealing with *Reform and Transformation of Public Services* includes a reference to addressing increasing delays in the processing of criminal cases, the high numbers of prisoners held on remand and the low numbers of Police Officers. There was an acknowledgment that efforts to deliver transformation have been challenging due to more immediate demand-led pressures and resource constraints. In response, the Northern Ireland Executive set aside a bespoke Transformation Fund of £235 million to deliver service improvements across the priority areas. A project submitted by the Department of

³ Northern Ireland Executive, *Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'*, March 2025 available at https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/programme-for-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most_2.pdf

Justice (DoJ), Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the PPS was awarded £20.45 million to reduce delay, maximise efficiencies and free up capacity in the Courts for more serious cases, including a stronger focus on the Early Engagement and Out of Court Disposals workstreams.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE STRATEGIES

- 2.5 The DoJ *Corporate Plan 2025-28 and 2025-26 Business Plan* have been aligned with the PfG.⁴ One of the key priorities has been Speeding Up Justice, which reflects the work of the Criminal Justice Board (CJB), which brings together criminal justice system strategic leaders. Members of the CJB, including the DPP, have told Inspectors that despite numerous programmes and projects, it has remained difficult to align stakeholders to an agreed longer-term strategic approach and to reach agreement on joint targets. For the PPS, the lack of sufficient funding has been presented by its leaders as a major constraint to longer-term planning, though there was also an acceptance that individual organisational priorities and target setting may not be aligned with wider initiatives and programmes.
- 2.6 Speeding Up Justice has been a priority for the CJB, with five established workstreams, one of which, Early Engagement, had been led by the PPS:
- Early Engagement;
 - Digital;
 - Magistrates' Court Remit;
 - Committal Reform; and
 - Out of Court Disposals.
- 2.7 As resources and capacity have struggled to meet demands across the criminal justice system, the CJB piloted and implemented a series of initiatives to better manage and moderate demand. This included greater police powers to dispose of lower-level cases and divert from the formal prosecution/Court stages as well as new ways to deal with cases that still require Prosecutor decisions. The use of Community Resolution Notices as non-PPS disposals has been the topic of a separate CJI Inspection Report.⁵
- 2.8 A pilot project aimed at streamlining the file submission arrangements between the PSNI and the PPS was established in November 2023. The pilot authorised PSNI Officers to take a 'No File Decision' in cases involving certain offences, where they deemed it appropriate to take no further action. It was anticipated that this would reduce the number of files submitted to the PPS by an estimated 5,000 to

4 *Department of Justice, Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and Business Plan 2025-2026, July 2025* available at [Corporate Plan 2025–2028 and Business Plan 2025-26](#)

5 *CJI, An Inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland 's Use of Community Resolution Notices, October 2025* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/>

6,000 per year.⁶ An interim evaluation of the pilot found that the number of no prosecution files received by the PPS had fallen from around 120 to 45 per week, but that the resource savings to the PPS were significantly less due to the relative simplicity of these cases. The interim evaluation report shows that there will be benefits to the PPS in terms of its Prosecutor pressures but not to the level that was envisaged. The full evaluation report is expected later in 2025.

- 2.9 The importance of planning and managing for not guilty anticipated pleas as well as increasing earlier guilty pleas from defendants has been raised across a number of CJI inspections and has the potential to free up significant resources across the criminal justice system. Most of the work associated with preparing for contests or trials in the Courts essentially becomes nugatory when a defendant pleads guilty in advance of the contest or trial. The timing of guilty pleas is later in the process compared to England and Wales, where Not Guilty Courts have been in operation for many years.
- 2.10 The investigation and prosecution of legacy cases has remained resource intensive for the criminal justice system – prosecution decisions on these cases have been taken by the PPS Central Casework Section. Senior leaders confirmed that legacy cases and workload have not decreased and that between 2019 and 2024, 38 legacy cases have been the subject of prosecution decisions by the PPS. There is also a higher likelihood of reviews of no prosecution decisions in these cases and Inspectors were told that the DPP and Deputy Director have devoted an increasing amount of their time to these cases. The PPS had submitted business cases to the DoF for additional funding for a bespoke legacy prosecution/casework unit. For example, additional funding of £0.5 million was received in 2020 to deal with an increase in legacy cases including Operation Kenova⁷ files (less than half the projected costs in the business case). There was no additional funding from the Northern Ireland Office and these cases were funded exclusively from the Northern Ireland Block Grant. The PPS did receive some additional funding in 2021-22, which allowed an increase of Prosecutors in Central Casework.
- 2.11 One of the challenges for the PPS had been the uncertainty around future demands associated with legacy and its implications for the resourcing and deployment of Investigators and Prosecutors. At the time of fieldwork, there were 10-12 major legacy reviews ongoing, though the likely impacts of the role of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery was uncertain.

6 This was later revised prior to the interim evaluation (based on experience gained from the Pilot) to 4,000 - 5,000 per year.

7 Operation Kenova is an independent investigation into a range of activities surrounding an alleged individual codenamed Stakeknife. For further information please see [Operation Kenova](#)

PPS STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- 2.12 The PPS has outlined its strategic vision to 2030⁸ in a programme of work over five to six years to deliver a more efficient organisation that will target resources to those areas of greatest priority and where greatest value can be added. The overarching objectives of *PPS 2030* were to:
- *redesign and optimise [the] service delivery model and processes to deliver our [PPS] business more effectively;*
 - *develop arrangements to allow cases to be dealt with proportionately and contribute to the reduction of avoidable delay;*
 - *support staff and key stakeholders to work in a changing environment; and*
 - *achieve a sustainable financial operating model for the PPS in the longer-term.*
- 2.13 The means of realising that vision has been incorporated into the objectives and targets set out in the PPS Business Plan.⁹ Corporate planning was agreed by the Management Board, in consultation with the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (the Attorney General). When asked about whether the Business Plan reflected the vision of *PPS 2030*, both PPS leaders and staff pointed Inspectors to the difficulties of measuring performance against a longer-term vision. A Corporate Plan, perhaps for three years, could provide a better means to set and meaningfully measure performance against these higher-level priorities.
- 2.14 The PPS has set the same five key priorities in each of its annual Business Plans since 2021-22. These were:
- supporting a safer community by providing an effective and high quality prosecution service;
 - building confidence in the independence, fairness and effectiveness of the Service;
 - meeting the needs of victims and witnesses;
 - strengthening our capability by continuously improving the way we work; and
 - supporting and empowering our people.
- 2.15 The annual Business Plan has been developed on the basis of performance scorecards produced at corporate, region, section and branch level and finalised following internal workshops attended by Management Board members (including two Non-Executives), Assistant Directors and Heads of Branch. The final Business Plan was aligned with wider criminal justice initiatives such as Speeding Up Justice, the Working Together Programme with the PSNI and criminal justice digital and technology strategies.

8 *PPS 2030: A strategic vision for the future of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland*, internal PPS document (hard copy). Elements of the vision have been included in the published PPS Business Plan 2025-26.

9 *PPS, Annual Business Plan 2025-26, June 2025* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/publications/annual-business-plan-2025-26>

- 2.16 Feedback from senior leaders who helped develop the Business Plan and other staff from across the PPS was that it could have been more strategic and targeted and had too many Key Performance Measures that were not conducive to longer-term planning or the measurement of progress against the *PPS 2030* vision. There was also an acknowledgement from senior leaders that joint performance targets or metrics, with the PSNI in particular, would be more supportive of ongoing and planned partnership and co-ordination of services delivery in key areas such as reducing delays. The Working Together Programme has been the most ambitious example of a joint approach by the PPS and the PSNI and offers the mechanism for the development of joint timeliness and qualitative targets, preferably though not necessarily, dependent on the setting of end-to-end timeliness target(s) by the CJB.

PPS ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

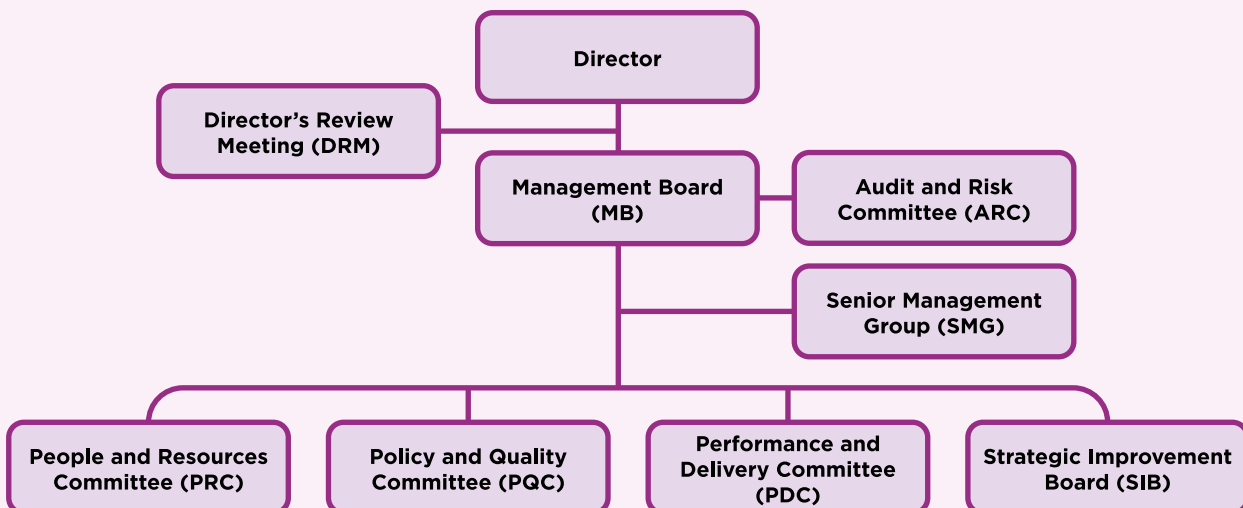
- 2.17 In accordance with Section 42(1) of the 2002 Act, the functions of the DPP shall be exercised by him independently of any other person. The independence of the Office has been enshrined in legislation with no explicit lines of accountability to a Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive, to an Ombudsman, an independent Board or to the Attorney General. The latter relationship changed with the devolution of justice powers in 2010 when superintendence and direction of the Attorney General was replaced by a more consultative relationship on matters for which the Attorney General is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Inspectors did not hear any particular concerns, from within PPS or from external stakeholders, around the operation of these accountability arrangements.
- 2.18 As a non-ministerial department, funded by the DoF, there has been regular engagement with DoF officials around the setting of budgets, monitoring of spend, addressing funding pressures as well as understanding the future direction and resourcing of the organisation. For the most part, these relationships have been positive for the PPS, with relatively good recent budget settlements and additional in-year funding in the context of the wider budget pressures on public services in Northern Ireland.
- 2.19 A difficulty for the DPP has been the lack of a political voice to advocate for its interests and this was best expressed by the DPP as him having '*no pathway for wider political engagement with the Executive*'. In a letter to the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers in 2024, the Director noted that PPS concerns about the timeliness of decision-making and pressures on staff were unlikely to find recognition in political considerations while other organisations within the criminal justice system were better able to utilise political influence.

2.20 The PPS Corporate Governance Framework¹⁰, as approved by the Management Board, was designed to align with the key principles set out in the DoF guidance, 'Corporate Governance in Central Government Departments: Code of Good Practice NI' (2013), which was updated in 2025.¹¹ It provides detailed information on the sound system of internal direction and control, which the DPP as Accounting Officer oversees within the PPS to achieve the organisation's objectives, while safeguarding the public funds and Departmental assets for which they are personally responsible. The PPS's corporate governance arrangements comply with DoF's guidance, except in one regard. The guidance states that in non-ministerial departments there should be an agreement as to which Minister(s) from within the Northern Ireland Executive should answer for the Department's affairs in the Assembly. Under current arrangements there is no agreement on this point. Assembly Questions, which cannot be answered by any other Department, are therefore dealt with through direct correspondence with the MLA concerned. There is an option available to the PPS to explore new arrangements for representing its affairs in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

On publication of this report, the Director of Public Prosecutions should initiate discussions with the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and relevant Ministers on their representation of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland affairs in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Figure 2: PPS Governance Structure



10 PPS, *Corporate Governance Framework, Version 7, March 2022*, unpublished at this time.

11 Department of Finance, *Corporate governance in central government departments: Code of good practice NI, February 2025* available at: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/daodof0225att.pdf>

- 2.21 The PPS Management Board supports the Director in his leadership of the PPS and in reaching decisions on the strategic direction of the PPS (Figure 2). In addition to the Director, Deputy Director and two Senior Assistant Directors, its membership also includes two Non-Executive Members and the Acting Financing Director. Drawing on the substantial experience of the Non-Executive Members, the PPS has been able to broaden its decision-making processes, enable a greater level of challenge and externally promote the strategic priorities of the organisation. Inspectors were able to evidence good working relationships at Management Board level through reading Board minutes and interviews with all attendees.
- 2.22 The Management Board has responsibility for the definition of the PPS's vision, aims and objectives, ownership of the Corporate Plan and monitoring of performance objectives and budget on a regular basis. It receives information for each meeting on key areas of performance including achievement against agreed key delivery targets and financial data. The corporate risk register is reviewed at each Management Board meeting. It has been supported by six committees which play a key role in PPS governance.
- 2.23 Effective performance monitoring and management is dependent on the availability and use of quality management information to inform decision-making. Inspectors were told about and shown the information that was provided in advance of Management Board meetings, which in the main was substantial and detailed. The feedback from most attendees, including the Non-Executive Members, was that much of this information was not in a format to facilitate informed decision-making – some of it was too complicated and it was too broad in scope to inform timely decision-making. The practice of each of the operational committees reporting to the Management Board had ensured a constant flow of information, but it also diverted the agenda of the meeting towards operational matters.
- 2.24 In June 2023 the PPS appointed the Business Consultancy Services of the DoF to facilitate a Board Effectiveness Review. One of its recommendations was the importance of keeping Management Board meetings strategic. Inspectors would support the full implementation of this recommendation.
- 2.25 One of the findings of the Business Consultancy Services report, to aid organisational performance, was to review how performance information was presented to the Management Board and to introduce a dashboard incorporating all performance metrics. At the time of fieldwork, this dashboard was under development and there were discussions on how best to show performance in key areas such as the size of caseloads and the length of time cases waited for a decision. PPS senior leaders conceded that performance data was no longer fit for purpose and that there was also a need to have access to live data. There was a view that performance reports had not changed in over a decade and that decisions were often retrospective and not fully taking account of new developments such as a spike in new cases or an increase in sickness absence.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should have successfully implemented and be effectively utilising a new and effective performance dashboard.

- 2.26 The Audit and Risk Committee (ARC Committee) reviews the corporate risks and receives regular reports concerning matters of internal control. On an annual basis the ARC Committee examines a report from senior management outlining key reputational risks for the organisation. Issues covered in the two years prior to fieldwork included the PPS budget settlements, in-year allocations and technical transfers, resourcing, regional caseloads, counsel expenditure and the Annual Report and Accounts. It has been chaired by an independent Non- Executive Director and it formally reports in writing to the Management Board and Director after each meeting.
- 2.27 The Director's Review Meeting generally takes place on a weekly basis. This provides an opportunity for the Management Board to discuss current resource, governance and operational issues and be provided with advice and direction on specific items of business that need to be progressed.
- 2.28 The primary role of the Senior Management Group was to support the Director and the Management Board in delivering the PPS's vision and strategic objectives as well as facilitating effective communication between the Management Board and its committees. It was chaired by the Deputy Director and its membership included the two Senior Assistant Directors together with the Heads of Policy and Information and Resource Management.
- 2.29 The People and Resources Committee was responsible to the Management Board for ensuring the efficient and effective management of PPS finances and resources, managing the process of organisational change and providing direction and co-ordination in the management and implementation of new corporate initiatives. Its chair was the Senior Assistant Director for Resources and Change with membership from four Assistant Directors and three Section Heads.
- 2.30 The Performance and Delivery Committee was responsible for key organisational performance standards and targets including:
- driving continuous improvement in operational performance and working practices;
 - identifying strategic and operational issues impacting on delivery; and
 - ensuring the effectiveness of case management arrangements.

It was chaired by the Senior Assistant Director for Serious Crime and Regions with membership from four Assistant Directors and the Head of Resource Management.

- 2.31 The Policy and Quality Committee was responsible for monitoring and considering key legal policy issues impacting on the organisation and setting priorities for future legal policy development and quality assurance activity. A review of the minutes of these meetings during 2023 and 2024 showed discussions and advice on policies such as Stalking, Domestic Abuse, Victims and Witnesses, Special Measures and Hate Crime. It was chaired by the Deputy Director and had membership from four Assistant Directors and the head of Policy and Information. A review by a consultancy firm, commissioned by the PPS¹², found that there was insufficient impact assessment of new policies and processes, which can result in additional resource pressures or unintended consequences when implemented and a lack of understanding of the end-to-end impact of changes to processes.
- 2.32 The Strategic Improvement Board has been in operation since 2019, chaired by the Deputy Director, to prioritise new projects and to monitor ongoing initiatives. It created a Programme Manager post within the Strategic Improvement Team to catalogue the project portfolio of the PPS and assess the resource impact and change management aspects of delivery. This had included significant multiagency programmes and projects such as Committal Reform and the delivery of the Digital Justice Strategy as well as numerous internal service delivery projects such as Remote Evidence Centre usage and designing and evaluating the No File Decision pilot. Electronic signing of summons was also part of its remit. It was proposed by the PPS at time of fieldwork that the remit of the Strategic Improvement Board should be amended to oversee and prioritise the numerous projects that require delivery against competing resource availability.
- 2.33 The Strategic Improvement Board was supported by a Modernisation and Project Management Office which has been established to progress the delivery of *PPS 2030*. This team is responsible for the co-ordination, prioritisation and control of modernisation projects throughout the organisation, utilising established project management techniques and practices.
- 2.34 The overall organisational structure and various committees was more fragmented and complex than comparable organisations within the criminal justice system, though attendees cited the value and benefits of each of the committees and the importance of delegated decision-making on many operational and project issues. Inspectors noted that there was a review process included in the terms of reference for some of the committees and would support the practice of periodic reviews of their effectiveness, including resourcing implications and the avoidance of duplication.

¹² A PA Consulting Report on Improving Operational Performance was presented to the PPS Management Board in December 2023. It is an internal document and was not published.

2.35 The investment in the post of Resource and Change, as the most senior non-legal post (Grade 3) in the organisation, has represented a commitment from the DPP and senior leaders to better co-ordinate all resources to help deliver business transformation and performance improvement. Realising the full benefits of that investment would point towards a broader organisational reach to encompass an alignment of all business functions to achieving the *PPS 2030* vision.

2.36 Efforts by the Management Board to change the reporting arrangements for the Regions Business Managers from Assistant Directors (legal) to the Senior Assistant Director (Resource and Change) were not implemented due to concerns raised among legal and business staff. These concerns were repeated by some Assistant Directors and Business Managers in meetings with Inspectors and centred around the importance of having a co-ordinated approach within the Regions. Balancing the benefits of improved accountability within the Regions and within specialised units with wider organisational priorities remains a challenge for the Management Board.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should commence a review of the effectiveness of its reporting arrangements and operational committees and assure itself that the Senior Assistant Director Resource and Change role is optimised to support effective organisational performance.

2.37 Regional Prosecutors and Assistant Directors and Corporate Services Business Heads were responsible for maintaining effective risk management arrangements within their own areas. Each Region/Section risk register is reviewed on a quarterly basis at Performance and Accountability Meetings. Assurance Statements have been completed by all Assistant Directors and Heads of Business on a quarterly basis. The Statements focus on a range of key issues such as business planning, performance monitoring and risk management. The PPS, in its self-assessment to CJI, had identified these arrangements as a strength in its monitoring and management of organisational performance.

2.38 The Business Consultancy Services report on PPS Board Effectiveness found a disconnect between the senior management and the organisation from Assistant Director level downwards. Inspectors examined the extent of this disconnect as part of this inspection and consider the potential impacts on organisational performance. The Assistant Directors confirmed that there was frustration around their input to strategic decision-making, most specifically in relation to the development of strategic and business plans. There was also an acceptance that ongoing workload pressures would limit their ability to take on new responsibilities. Senior leaders in the PPS were aware of these concerns and were making efforts to improve this key relationship at the time of fieldwork.

- 2.39 A disconnect between the Senior Management and other staff across the organisation was more apparent to Inspectors after hearing many concerns and frustrations around workload pressures and a perceived lack of awareness and level of importance attached to it by Senior Management. While some of these frustrations can be attributed to the wider resourcing and workload challenges within the organisation, there is also a need to improve how these messages have been communicated across the organisation. The recurring and concerning statement to Inspectors that their *"views wouldn't make it to the 4th floor"*, needs to be addressed by senior leaders as it was negatively impacting on performance and the appetite for further change among staff.

PARTNERSHIP AND WORKING TOGETHER PROGRAMME

- 2.40 There was a recognition from all staff within the PPS Inspectors spoke to that partnership working with other criminal justice organisations was critical to improved PPS performance and best use of its available resources. Solutions to reducing avoidable delay were seen as having an internal and external dimension, particularly in relation to improved file quality from the PSNI, readiness to proceed when cases reach the Courts and the role of the defence. The Director pointed to the importance of partnerships at the CJB where new priorities at the time of fieldwork included the No File Decision Pilot, the expansion of Community Resolution Notices, the implementation of electronic signatures for summons, the implementation of 'Gateway' arrangements in summary cases and a new indictable file build.
- 2.41 Senior leaders also pointed to the importance of a strengthened working relationship with the PSNI based around the Working Together Programme. A Working Together Programme Board was established in 2023 by senior management in the PPS and PSNI to provide a framework for the delivery of joint PSNI/PPS projects and service improvement initiatives, aligned to DoJ and CJB priorities. It has been co-chaired by the Deputy Director and an Assistant Chief Constable and there has been direct engagement between the Director and the Chief Constable. The Programme Board have identified three priority work strands around Modernisation and Transformation, Out of Court Disposals and File Quality and Disclosure. The successful bid to the Executive Transformation Fund was based around this model of partnership, supported by the DoJ and aligned with the PfG. It has also helped to counter a view from other parts of the criminal justice system (as confirmed in interviews with Inspectors) that the PPS has been slower to embrace change and respond to transformation projects as well as provide detail on what joint performance measures would look like.

- 2.42 The importance of building effective and sustainable working relationships between Prosecutors and the Police has been demonstrated in successive inspections from England and Wales. A joint inspection report found that the long-standing issue of police file quality, timeliness of charging advice and changes to how case files were built were increasing tensions and impacting relationships at senior and frontline levels and that previous recommendations on clear shared performance metrics and joined up priorities had not been implemented.¹³
- 2.43 The PPS and PSNI Working Together Programme Board provides a suitable mechanism to implement joint demand modelling, broadly comparable to what has been done for forensic services between the PSNI and Forensic Science Northern Ireland.¹⁴ That would involve a sharing of policing priorities, projected crime and investigation patterns together with policing resources to inform PPS budgeting and balance of staffing and other resources. Data from the Causeway system, which collates data from when a case enters the criminal justice system to disposal, could also be used to inform future prosecution cases and workloads. There was no evidence available to Inspectors to show that this data was used for this purpose.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- 2.44 The PPS Risk Management Framework was presented as part of its Governance Statement and published in the Annual Report and Accounts. Risks were reviewed and mitigated at Management Group meetings and the risk register had reflected the primary risks facing the organisation. The Non-Executive Directors, who had oversight of risk management, confirmed their assurance of the processes in place and were able to report an openness among senior leaders to challenge and risk management.

13 *His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPIS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service, July 2025* available at <https://hmcpsi.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/report/joint-case-building-by-the-police-and-crown-prosecution-service-2/>

14 *CJI, It's With Forensics: An Inspection of Forensic Services in Northern Ireland, February 2024* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/inspection-of-forensic-services-in-northern-ireland/>

CHAPTER 3: DELIVERY

BUDGET

- 3.1 The PPS received a total budget allocation of £44.3 million for 2024-25, which mainly comprised staffing (£27.3 million) and legal and Court costs including Counsel fees (£7.3 million).¹⁵ The budget allocation for 2025-26 was £46.3 million.¹⁶ The resource budget increased from £39.4 million in 2024-25 to £41.3 million in 2025-26. It will also receive part of the DoJ Transformation Fund project (£20.45 million over five years). The PPS has started each financial year with a budget deficit of between £1 and £3 million and has relied on in-year monitoring round bids to close the gap. Most of the in-year bids have funded additional use of Counsel, which have been difficult to estimate and accrue at year-end, as many bills would not have been received for casework. This has led to the technical qualification of year-end accounts.
- 3.2 Prior to inspection fieldwork, the Director had written to the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister as well as the Justice and Finance Ministers to state his view that the PPS has been consistently under-funded in its annual baseline budget and was increasingly unable to deliver its core services to the standards as outlined in the *PPS 2030* vision and to proactively engage in broader change and transformation initiatives.
- 3.3 The resource budget increases over the past three years have allowed the PPS to make substantive appointments to posts that were either temporarily filled or vacant and the allocation from the Transformation Fund was intended to provide additional posts, particularly for Senior Public Prosecutors, over a five-year period. The likely introduction of multi-year budgets from 2026-27 should also provide more certainty for business planning purposes.
- 3.4 The issue of constrained public spending remained a key risk for the organisation as part of an overall contraction in criminal justice spending. The DoJ has reported that its share of the Northern Ireland Executive's budget fell from 11% in 2011-12 to 8% in 2025-26 and that the DoJ budget was £225m below where it would be if it had at least kept pace with inflation.¹⁷

15 *PPS, Annual Business Plan 2024-25, July 2024* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/publications/annual-business-plan-2024-25>

16 *PPS, Annual Business Plan 2025-26, June 2025* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/publications/annual-business-plan-2025-26>

17 *DoJ, Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and Business Plan 2025-2026, July 2025* available at [Corporate Plan 2025–2028 and Business Plan 2025-26](#).

Senior leaders in the PPS also drew attention to the differential approach to funding of the criminal justice systems in England and Wales as well as the Republic of Ireland. The budget of the Director of Public Prosecutions in the Republic of Ireland had increased by 40% from 2020 to 2024 to broadly match funding increases elsewhere in the justice system. The importance of aligning budget settlements across the criminal justice system was strongly advocated by the DPP as differential funding agreements on increased Police Officer numbers for example, could create increased demands on other parts of the criminal justice system without reciprocal funding.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should work with the Department of Finance, as part of its engagement on a multi-year budget from 2026-27, to better align its opening budget to projected budget settlements for criminal justice system organisations funded by the Department of Justice.

STAFFING CAPACITY

- 3.5 The PPS's Full Time Equivalent staffing level, as at 31 March 2024, was 410 permanent staff, 64 temporary staff and four seconded staff. Over the course of that year, the PPS were able to recruit 21 additional staff and make a small number of permanent appointments among existing staff. There was a high reliance on the use of agency staff (20% in 2024) to cover unfilled vacancies, particularly at the Public Prosecutor grade (Deputy Principal) and to cover higher levels of sickness absence compared to previous years.
- 3.6 Most of the Public Prosecutors and Senior Public Prosecutors were based in the regions with Belfast/Eastern accounting for 50 Public Prosecutors (including 11 Senior Public Prosecutors) and over 100 administrative staff. All staff were based in the Belfast office and dealt with around 23,000 case files per year. The Western/Southern region had 44 Public Prosecutors and 100 administrative staff based in Foyle and Newry with a satellite office in Omagh. They had dealt with 19,000 case files each year.
- 3.7 Getting the right balance between the resourcing of the PPS and its workload has been undertaken through the development of a Capacity Model that was most recently undertaken in 2015.
- 3.8 Prior to undertaking a new Capacity Model, an externally commissioned report on operational performance concluded that the measurement of workload and capacity did not accurately reflect the demands associated with current caseloads.

That was due to the lack of any substantial reviews or adjustments to the original Capacity Model and was an issue of concern and frustration for many staff during this inspection. Senior leaders also accepted that the 2015 Capacity Model was no longer fit for purpose and had prioritised the development of a new Capacity Model.

- 3.9 There were differing views on whether core organisational activities, such as the time to take prosecution decisions, were being accurately measured in the development of the new Capacity Model especially as this data was also used to set performance targets. The use of Prosecutor Activity Sheets was the principal means of recording activities, though there was a view from Public and Senior Public Prosecutors that these sheets did not capture all their work undertaken on cases such as victim and witness liaison. An interim review of legal capacity, which was undertaken in May and June 2024, was based on data from the existing Prosecutor Activity Sheet. Data analysis was done by the Modernisation Team, that had made a number of interim recommendations, subject to a more comprehensive evaluation. The outputs from the review were intended to be used to inform the development of new minimum Prosecutor standards (at time of fieldwork these were seven decisions each casework day for Public Prosecutors and 0.8 for Senior Public Prosecutors). It was intended that further analysis would be undertaken, that would be aligned with a separate review of administrative capacity and processes. That was ongoing at the time of the inspection.
- 3.10 The time gap between Capacity Models, combined with the lack of any substantial review and adjustments, meant that the PPS struggled to deal with the resourcing of big changes in demand, new policy initiatives and the establishment of new structures in the PPS. An example of the latter was the establishment of the Serious Crime Unit, where the Capacity Model did not adequately reflect the number and grades of staff required to deliver the work of the Unit with the result that urgent actions were required to re-deploy staff from elsewhere in the organisation. This led to spikes in workloads and delays in the regions, where staff were mostly abstracted.
- 3.11 The core activities of a PPS Public Prosecutor were:
- consideration of files submitted by police and government departments with a view to deciding, or advising, as to prosecution in cases alleging the commission of an offence which can be prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court and the Crown Court;
 - preparation of papers for prosecution, where appropriate, and directing such charges and evidence as is appropriate in each case;
 - attending Court and conducting the prosecution of cases anywhere in Northern Ireland, in the Magistrates' Courts and, on occasion in the County Court;
 - on occasion preparing committal papers in indictable cases;
 - providing prosecutorial advice, liaising and communicating with criminal justice stakeholders including victims and witnesses;

- assisting senior colleagues with Crown Court prosecutions; and
- carrying out such other duties as required by the business needs of the PPS.

3.12 A review of the staffing resources in the PPS business and administrative functions was a linked strategic project at the time of the inspection. Meetings with business staff from across the different Directorates and Units found significant workload pressures, which resulted in lower morale and job satisfaction as well as increased levels of sickness absences. There was also evidence of good working relationships within and between the different business teams such as staff working in Case Preparation providing support to Central Casework – the latter did not have structured administrative support. Inspectors were told that the administrative pressures in the Fraud and Departmental Team meant that Prosecutors were required to step in to deal with tasks such as redaction of files (some files were over 1,000 pages). While this type of collegiality was a positive example of a shared commitment to problem solving, it also reflected the need for a more strategic approach to workforce planning and best use of resources.

3.13 The Terms of Reference for the PPS review of administrative functions included a:

- review of all administrative processes within regional functions;
- consideration of performance measures for processes, individuals and teams, aligned with the PPS strategic priorities;
- analysis at the 'hand off' stages between administrator and Prosecutor; and
- consideration of the requirement for a new legal support/paralegal role.

The review commenced in June 2024 and was scheduled to be completed during 2025.

3.14 One of the areas of greatest inefficiency relates to the continued use of paper-based files, manifested by continuous photocopying, relaying of files between legal and administrative sections and the need to produce hard copies for legal practitioners and the Courts. Many of the practices were more akin to the 20th century and it has been a wider challenge for the criminal justice system as part of its digital strategies and transformation.¹⁸ The responses to the COVID-19 pandemic had led to more innovative approaches and better use of technology such as electronic information sharing and the use of Sightlink/video Courts and Remote Evidence Centres, but progress has been much slower in relation to the exclusive use of electronic casefiles. Greater progress on digital transformation would offer significant efficiency savings for the PPS and other criminal justice organisations and allow a re-allocation of scarce resources to other functions.

18 *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/>

CASE NUMBERS AND PROFILE

3.15 The PPS has published a yearly Statistical Bulletin¹⁹ showing its activity including caseloads and prosecutorial decisions. It received a total of 38,682 files in 2024-25, a decrease of 12% on 2023-24, which continues a downward trend over the past decade (Table 1). Around 99% of files came from the PSNI with most of the remaining cases received from Government Departments.

Table 1: PPS files received by Type, Region/Function

Financial Year	File Type	Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS
2024-25	Indictable	820	563	741	3	2,127
	Hybrid	11,031	7,451	325	143	18,950
	Summary	10,398	7,060	1	146	17,605
	All Files	22,249	15,074	1,067	292	38,682
2023-24	Indictable	784	554	750	14	2,102
	Hybrid	12,516	8,288	322	149	21,275
	Summary	12,057	8,200	2	341	20,600
	All Files	25,357	17,042	1,074	504	43,977

Source: PPS Statistical Bulletin 2024-25

3.16 The fall in file numbers has been confined to less serious (summary) and medium level (hybrid) offences. For hybrid offences, the prosecution has the discretion to proceed either summarily or by indictment based on the seriousness of the offence. The number of the most serious cases (indictable) has remained more stable at just over 2,000 each year. The PPS has reported a steady increase in serious and more complex casework since 2016, most particularly for serious sexual offences, domestic violence and legacy as well as the challenges of cyber crime and increases in cases with digital evidence. The PPS calculated that the number of more serious case files submitted (those which usually result in a Crown Court prosecution) has increased by 30% in the 10 years to 2024. Many of these cases have included sexual offences, most of which have been allocated to the Serious Crime Unit. Prosecutors stated that proportionally more of these cases have been contested at trials requiring more time and resources.

3.17 The largest proportion of PSNI cases relate to motoring offences (34%).²⁰ CJI has previously made a recommendation in 2016 to the PPS and other key stakeholders to scope the delivery of a road traffic prosecution team approach to operate within a centralised Traffic Court that could be based on the approach taken in England and Wales where uncontested or guilty plea cases had been prosecuted for certain

19 PPS and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Statistical Bulletin 2024/25, July 2025 available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2025-07/Statistical%20Bulletin%202024-25.pdf>

20 PPS and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Statistical Bulletin 2024/25, July 2025 available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2025-07/Statistical%20Bulletin%202024-25.pdf>

offences, without the need for Prosecutors or defendants to be present. There has been limited progress on delivering this recommendation though senior leaders in the PPS were open to its potential to free up resources and refocus efforts on more serious traffic and other offences.

FILE ALLOCATION

- 3.18 The PPS has operated an internal classification system to aid the allocation of files to Public Prosecutors and Senior Public Prosecutors and to help monitor and manage performance in relation to the timeliness of decision-making and overall case progression. The classification of complexity has been based on variables such as number of witnesses, pages of evidence and primary offence type. The most serious cases have been classified as categories 1-4, which had 5,000 files in 2023-24. It includes a mix of indictable and hybrid offences. An external review referred to the importance of reviewing this classification model as case profiles and types of evidence change.
- 3.19 The method of file allocation has been contentious since the establishment of the PPS, and issues of transparency and performance management have been raised by Prosecutors in successive inspections. An element of 'self-selection' was still happening with the result that some 'unattractive' cases were left in the unallocated queue for longer than expected and were then allocated by line managers, though Prosecutors acknowledged that "*the days of getting allocations in by grabbing quick hits no longer exist*".
- 3.20 The bigger challenge for the PPS relates to how the allocation of files and the progression of cases had impacted on the measurement of performance. Many Public Prosecutors felt that performance targets were increasingly hard to achieve as a greater proportion of cases were complex and the straight-forward cases were either not submitted to the PPS or were allocated to new and temporary staff. Some Public Prosecutors claimed that file decision targets could only be achieved by working outside core hours. Files were sometimes allocated to Public Prosecutors just before a Court date with insufficient time to read the file and having to deal with imminent statute barred dates. It was concerning that senior leaders were not confident of a fair spread of complex and more straight forward work among Public Prosecutors. Data that was presented to the Performance and Delivery Committee and then to the Management Group had indicated a level of under-performance and missing of targets for those who had responsibility for more complex work in the Regions. Specialist Units such as Central Casework and Serious Crime Unit did not have equivalent performance targets. All of this points to the need for more consistent and reliable management information to inform target setting and performance management.

PROSECUTION DECISIONS

- 3.21 The number of prosecution decisions taken each year has continued to fall in line with fewer files submitted by the PSNI. A total of 48,665 prosecution decisions were issued in 2023-24 which was 14% less than the previous year and represented a 21% decrease since 2012-13.²¹
- 3.22 The time to take decisions was getting longer with PPS data showing that the number of files awaiting a decision (that is unallocated and allocated pre decision combined) at the end of March 2024 stood at 6,536, an increase of 19% from March 2023. The backlog and associated pressures were most apparent in the Regions with Belfast and Eastern most impacted. This was in part due to the re-deployment of Prosecutors to specialist functions such as the Serious Crime Unit to deal with a spike in demand and an increased focus by the criminal justice system on progressing Crown Court cases. At one point it was boosted by nine Senior Public Prosecutors from other parts of the PPS.
- 3.23 Additional Prosecutor resources had helped to ease the pressures at the time of fieldwork with the result that the overall work queue had decreased by 6% compared to the end of 2023. The number of serious cases (case weighting 1-4) was continuing to increase, but this was balanced by a significant reduction in less serious cases (case weighting 5-8).
- 3.24 Balancing short-term responses to demand spikes and resourcing gaps with a more strategic long-term approach (as outlined in the *PPS 2030* vision) has presented a major challenge to Senior Leaders. The introduction of the three-region model may provide more flexibility, but it will not provide additional resources by itself or address some of the wider performance issues around delays in prosecution decisions and case readiness for the Courts.

EVIDENCE

- 3.25 Inspectors' meetings with PPS staff and stakeholders, including the PSNI and the two legal professions, all pointed to the increasing use and complexity of digital and multi-media evidence sourced from Body Worn Video, closed-circuit television, laptops and mobile phones. The PPS had estimated that reviewing digital evidence has added about 10% in Prosecutor time to case work. Prosecutors were frustrated at the volume that was submitted by the PSNI, while Police Officers would have wanted to see more specific PPS lines of enquiry and what needed to be submitted.

²¹ *PPS, Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, October 2024* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2024-10/Public%20Prosecution%20Service%20-%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%202023-24.pdf>

- 3.26 A joint protocol between the PPS and PSNI had been agreed and there is now a mechanism in place to deal with issues of contention such as the provision of Body Worn Video evidence and mixed media evidence. It is also part of the wider issue of the application of proportionality and can be linked to the findings of a CJI inspection on File Quality and Disclosure which recommended that the PPS and PSNI should *'scope and deliver new protocols for proportionate case-file building based on agreed evidential, technical and presentational standards'*.²²

WORKFORCE PLANNING

- 3.27 The need for a more robust approach to joint demand modelling by the PPS and the PSNI was apparent to Inspectors to better inform the allocation of resources and longer-term workforce planning. For example, Inspectors were made aware that the PPS had advance notice of the greater use of Body Worn Video, but that its potential impacts on the PPS were not modelled or incorporated into the existing Capacity Model.
- 3.28 Better demand modelling should be aligned with longer-term workforce planning, which at times over recent years appeared to be driven by short-term solutions such as the redeployments of Prosecutors, the increased reliance on temporary agency staff among the prosecution teams and the greater use of external Counsel in the Courts. Workforce planning has struggled to deal with these issues, and this was reflected in the Corporate Risk Register (June 2024) as one of the highest levels of residual risk. Filling vacancies for Public Prosecutors had become more difficult with the result that the Public Prosecutor appointment list (successful candidates deemed appointable and filled as vacancies arose) had been exhausted.
- 3.29 The use of paralegals, to undertake some of the responsibilities of Public Prosecutors, had been scoped by the PPS as a means of providing additional resources. In common with other public services such as health, education and policing, there has been consistent opposition to any perceived lowering of standards from Trade Unions and staff representative bodies and this was repeated to Inspectors by Prosecutors. Members of the legal profession cautioned against the introduction of PPS paralegals in the Courts. There were no further plans made available to CJI.
- 3.30 The use of agency staff has helped to cut backlogs and allowed other staff to focus on taking prosecution decisions. But it has created tensions within the prosecution teams and increased risks to quality standards. Inspectors heard from Prosecutors about agency staff not having signing authority to take prosecution decisions, not having sufficient criminal Court experience and a general lack of training. They were mainly used to conduct prosecutions in the Magistrates' Courts.

²² CJI, *An Inspection of File Quality, Disclosure and Case Progression and Trial Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic*, June 2023 available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/file-quality-disclosure-and-case-progression-and-trial-recovery-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

- 3.31 A corresponding increase in the use of Counsel, mainly in the Crown Court but also in the Magistrates' Courts, was also evident at the time of inspection and had become the biggest element of additional funding requests in recent years – that was in addition to the amount set-aside in the opening budget allocations. Financial data provided to Inspectors showed that the PPS had spent close to £0.6 million for Counsel in the Magistrates' Courts in 2023-24, which was lower than over £0.7 million the previous year. The outsourcing of legal expertise, either to Counsel in the Magistrates' Courts or agency staff, needs to be a core element of a new Workforce Plan.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should commence a Strategic Workforce Plan and complete its People Strategy. It should be informed by improved demand modelling undertaken with the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

TECHNOLOGY

- 3.32 Technology has been identified by PPS senior leaders as a key enabler of change to deliver performance improvement. Improving digital processes forms one of the priorities of the *PPS 2030* vision around replacing inefficient paper processes and improving efficiency across the criminal justice system. The three key projects of the Strategic Improvement Group were technology focused: implementation of the new Remote Evidence Centres, the introduction of electronic summons signing and enhancements to the PPS Case Management System.
- 3.33 One of the projects within the joint PPS/PSNI Working Together Programme (Modernisation and Transformation) has been focused on digital transformation and innovation and was led by the PPS's Head of Modernisation and a PSNI Superintendent. The PPS Business Plan 2024-25 had set *'the Implementation of PPS ICT Strategy objectives for 2024-25, including development support for CJSNI [Criminal Justice System Northern Ireland] initiatives and enhancements to the PPS Case Management System'* as one of its targets. Developing a new Digital Strategy was included in the Risk Register in June 2024.
- 3.34 There were notable achievements in the use of technology, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when new and innovative ways of working were quickly introduced for the transfer of files and evidence and the operation of remote Courts. The serving of digital evidence through a secure 'Box' system had worked really well according to those who used it, within and outside the PPS. The Assistant Directors also had a better record of what had been shared with Counsel. The Electronic Summons project was scheduled to be completed during the first part of 2025.

3.35 The area which offers the greatest benefit to the PPS was how fast the criminal justice system can transition away from a reliance on paper-based systems towards digital files. This has the potential to release significant resource savings and speed up case progression and could also help to deliver cultural change (transformation) around new ways of working.

PEOPLE

3.36 A one-year People Plan for 2024-25 was operational at the time of fieldwork which had four priorities. They were:

- workforce planning and organisational development;
- support and improve staff health and wellbeing;
- develop the leadership potential of all our staff; and
- communication and engagement.

3.37 Workforce planning had become more focused on short-term issues rather than the more strategic workforce challenges that needed to be addressed through a longer-term People Strategy and linked workforce plan. The People Plan was focussed on improvements to the recruitment process, which had been centrally undertaken by the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HR Connect). The plan included measures to fill existing vacancies to reduce the reliance on agency staff and deal with the large numbers and length of temporary promotions. The proportion of temporary agency staff used by the PPS had started to fall at time of fieldwork as more permanent positions had been filled.

3.38 Staff health and wellbeing was one of the highest risks on the Corporate Risk Register. Staff from across the organisation had told Inspectors how work pressures had increased stress levels, impacted job morale and contributed to sickness absences. The commitment of staff to their work was very evident to Inspectors but Inspectors also heard about change fatigue as they have focused on their normal day-to-day work. Senior leaders were aware of these concerns, though that awareness and understanding was not necessarily communicated to all staff.

3.39 Managing individual performance was identified as an issue in separate reviews commissioned by the PPS. An externally commissioned report recommended that the PPS should refresh its individual performance metrics, taking the opportunity to develop a set of metrics which are much more collaborative in nature. The annual Investor in People assessments and accreditation reports found that the organisation had responded well to the COVID-19 pandemic in promoting innovation and new ways of working.

- 3.40 The implementation of new ways of working, particularly the application of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Hybrid Working Policy, was an issue of importance for senior leaders and staff across the organisation.²³ An internal report for the Management Board on its implementation cited the importance of improving and consistently applying performance management for staff in office and home working environments as well as ensuring support and wellbeing. It examined the application of hybrid working and reflected the mixed views within the organisation on getting the right balance between remote and office attendance. It noted that there was no minimum in-office attendance requirement for the organisation – that decision was devolved to Assistant Directors, Heads of Business and Business Managers and was taken on the basis of the needs and operating model of business areas.
- 3.41 The application of hybrid working had created differences between and within business areas. Prosecutors referred to the requirement in Western and Southern Region to attend the office for two days each week compared to three days each week in Belfast and Eastern Region. There were also some differences between the administrative teams in the Regions. The internal report found that the application of hybrid working had led to performance issues, which needed to be resolved. It found that accommodating hybrid working, while ensuring all aspects of the Public Prosecutor role were covered, including attendance at Court, had been challenging. A drop in the screening of overnight charges for Laganside Court in Belfast (which required attendance in the office) led to complaints from the PSNI, Counsel and the Judiciary and some of these issues were repeated to Inspectors during this inspection.
- 3.42 There were also issues regarding urgent queries from Court and urgent summonses due to be statute barred that needed to be signed. These issues were largely resolved at the time of fieldwork. Inspectors have noted that an ongoing evaluation of the delivery of the policy and its impacts was included as an action in the 2025-26 Business Plan and would support more data on impacts such as the timeliness of decision-making, interfaces between business areas and the volume and quality of Court work to ensure that remote working is at least as efficient as office-based working. There is also a need to align with the updated Northern Ireland Civil Service Hybrid Working Policy that staff engaged in hybrid working must attend their designated workplace for at least 40% of their contractual working hours each week from September 2025. The PPS also need to quantify the benefits of remote working to assess different levels of productivity, work-life balance, the potential to change inefficient processes such as the signing of hardcopy paper summonses and the ability to recruit and retain staff (often in competition with other parts of the Civil and Public Service).

23 DoF, Northern Ireland Civil Service Hybrid Working Policy, October 2022 available at <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/DOF2023-0152%20-%20Annex%20B%20-%20NICS%20Hybrid%20Working%20Policy%20v1.3%20Oct%2022.PDF>

- 3.43 One of the outstanding issues was related to reward and recognition with particular concern expressed by Public Prosecutors around the lack of promotion and career development. A comparison with the Crown Prosecution Services for England and Wales shows faster career progression to more senior Prosecutor roles. Any changes to grading would need to be part of longer-term workforce planning and demand modelling taking account of the changing profile of Public Prosecutor workloads towards more complex cases and the right mix of Senior Public Prosecutor and Public Prosecutor resources.
- 3.44 Developing the leadership potential of all staff could be linked with better communication and engagement. Concerns around the effectiveness of engagement between senior leaders and the wider organisation had resulted in one of the highest levels of risk on the Corporate Risk Register. Focus groups of staff for this inspection demonstrated that the vision and some of the key corporate messages were not well communicated or appreciated by some staff. The Business Managers' Forum had not met for a couple of years, and this had contributed to a more silo-based approach across different business functions as well as a remoteness to some key strategic decisions.
- 3.45 Promoting a more inclusive culture to strategic planning was evident and the PPS, in its self-assessment for this inspection, had outlined the range of internal communications including regular updates on the PPS intranet, the publication of the 'Core Brief' following each meeting of the Management Board, the use of weekly updates on key events, the use of 'all staff meetings' through video conference, senior management events in Regional offices, the setting up of the PPS People Forum, participation in the Investor's in People Programme and learning from the Northern Ireland Civil Service People Survey. There was some frustration from the Assistant Directors around their input to strategic decision-making, most particularly in relation to transformation projects, which were delivered through the Strategic Improvement Board. Improvements were being implemented at the time of fieldwork. Staff working in the Victim and Witness Care Unit raised some specific concerns around the service delivery model for this joint service, delivered in partnership with the PSNI, and a growing sense of marginalisation from other parts of the PPS. This issue is covered in more detail in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: OUTCOMES

INTRODUCTION

4.1 The PPS, in its annual Business Plans, has aligned its five organisational priorities to a set of outcomes focused around delivering:

- a high quality prosecution service;
- increasing public confidence;
- improved services to victims and witnesses;
- reducing delay; and
- where all staff feel valued.

These outcomes were broadly in line with the *PPS 2030* vision. Measuring progress against these outcomes has been done through a series of initiatives and actions supported by Key Delivery Measures, which had been assessed in the Annual Report and Accounts. There were 19 Delivery Measures in the 2025-26 Business Plan compared to 20 in 2024-25.

4.2 The PPS has also published an annual Statistical Bulletin which included Official Statistics and performance data on caseload, prosecution decisions, timeliness and the outcome of prosecutions in Court. The Bulletin has included a summary of the key findings and comparisons with the previous year.²⁴

REDUCING DELAYS

4.3 Reducing delay has been a stated priority for the PPS and wider criminal justice system for over 20 years and during this time CJI has made a series of recommendations to help deliver performance improvement. A number of initiatives and projects have been implemented to Speed Up Justice, often led by the DoJ and the CJB. While separate evaluations and reviews have pointed to improved effectiveness and efficiency in parts of the criminal justice system, the overall impacts have been more limited as measured by longer end-to-end case times and from the increasingly negative experiences from users such as victims, witnesses and defendants.

²⁴ PPS and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Statistical Bulletin 2024/25, July 2025* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2025-07/Statistical%20Bulletin%202024-25.pdf>

- 4.4 There is a recognition and understanding within the criminal justice system that a sustained and meaningful reduction in avoidable delay requires joint actions across legislation, policies, processes and ways of working. A more proactive and collaborative approach has been evident to Inspectors in recent years around the Speeding Up Justice Programme with the establishment of five workstreams – Committal Reform; Early Engagement; Out of Court disposals; Remit of the Magistrates’ Court; and Digital. Each of these workstreams had been led by one of the criminal justice organisations, with collaborative arrangements with partner agencies. The PPS has led the early engagement work strand for the CJB, which has involved better communication and working together with the PSNI. A group of projects have been developed including a proposed early engagement Crown Court pilot, seeking agreement with the defence on issues such as proportionate file build, narrowing issues in contention and identification of early guilty pleas.
- 4.5 A performance management framework that includes agreed definitions for monitoring and measuring performance including joint end-to-end targets has been recommended by CJI and the Northern Ireland Audit Office in separate reports. A lack of jointly agreed metrics of performance makes it more difficult to demonstrate success and readily identify areas for improvement. It also makes it more difficult for the PPS and others to align their timeliness targets to a common standard with the result that some organisational targets and practices were counter-productive to the overall reduction in delay. Senior leaders in the PPS acknowledged that progress on the early engagement workstream would have benefited from joint performance metrics, particularly with the PSNI and would have helped to set expectations on engagement with defence practitioners.
- 4.6 The median time taken for a case to be completed across all Courts in Northern Ireland was 189 days in 2024-25, which was one day less than the previous year.²⁵ Crown Court charge cases were taking an average of 542 days to complete in 2024-25 compared to 551 days in 2023-24. For summons cases in the Crown Court, the average number of days in 2024-25 was 1,211 compared to 1,199 in the previous year. There was a 3% yearly improvement in case processing times for charge (92 days) and summons (223 days) cases in the adult Magistrates’ Courts. Case processing times in the Youth Courts were longer than the adult Courts with charge cases taking 158 days and summons cases taking 290 days in 2024-25.
- 4.7 The official statistics provide a breakdown of case progression by Court type and by offence category. For example, it took an average of 630 days to complete cases involving sexual offences in 2024-25. Data on the progression of cases at five key stages, which could be aligned with the work of specific criminal justice organisations, was separately provided to Inspectors.²⁶

25 DoJ and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Case Processing Time for Criminal Cases dealt with at Courts in Northern Ireland April 2024 to March 2025, August 2025* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/case-processing-time-criminal-cases-dealt-courts-northern-ireland-2425>

26 The figures relate to non-validated information from management information systems and should not be considered official statistics.

These were charge/informed, file preparation, PPS decision on prosecution, decision to first Court date and the final stage to disposal in the Courts.

- 4.8 A review of these quarterly reports shows that for criminal cases completed in the Crown Court in Quarter Three 2024-25, the median time from the date the offence was reported to the date the case was dealt with at Court was 742 days. This was an increase of 30 days from the previous quarter in 2024-25 and significantly longer than the median time of 476 days in 2014-15. The median times for adult Magistrates' Court charge cases in Quarter Three was 94 days and it was 223 days for summons cases. In the Youth Court, the median times were 161 days for charge cases and 297 days for summons cases. All of this data was showing long delays across the criminal justice system.
- 4.9 For the PPS, the stage from when a file has been received from the PSNI to first Court date was most relevant. The median time from file submitted to PPS to PPS decision for all Crown Court cases in Quarter Three 2024-25 was 207 days, which comprised a median time of 152 days for charge cases and 420 days for summons cases. For summons cases, that is the longest stage of the end-to-end process and it was replicated across all of the main offence types. The median time period from PPS decision to first Court date was 27 days for all Crown Court cases.
- 4.10 Analysis of the data by offence type shows relatively similar times for PPS decisions across Crown Court charge cases in Quarter Three 2024-25, though notably faster times for sexual offence cases which could be attributed to the specialist Serious Crime Unit in the PPS. For summons cases, the longest median times were evident in relation to drugs cases in particular which had a median time of 558 days for a PPS decision, though the median time from first Court appearance to Court disposal was shorter than all other offence types with the exception of motoring offences.
- 4.11 At the same time, there is also an onus on individual criminal justice organisations to not only proactively engage in joint initiatives but also to drive change and improve internal effectiveness and efficiency. In the absence of a joint end-to-end target (which could have included the key PPS stages in case progression), the PPS had set their own timeliness targets (10) in its 2023-24 Business Plan of which just three were assessed as achieved, which was the same number as the previous year.²⁷ Senior leaders attributed the causes of these delays to a mix of budget pressures, increased demands (more serious cases) and having to deal with existing case backlogs.
- 4.12 The primary timeliness target for the PPS has been to reduce the time for the issue of a prosecution decision. The median calendar days required for the issue of an indictable prosecution decision (prosecution in the Crown Court) was 197 days in

²⁷ PPS, *Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, October 2024* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2024-10/Public%20Prosecution%20Service%20-%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%202023-24.pdf>

2024-25, which was a slight decrease on the 204 days during 2023-24.²⁸ Summary prosecutions decisions (prosecution in the adult Magistrates' or Youth Court) had a median of 13 days, which was higher than the previous two years (12 days in 2023-24 and six days in 2022-23). There was no published data on the timeliness of cases at the post decision stages such as PPS preparation for Court and conclusion of the case.

- 4.13 Inspectors were provided with internal PPS performance and monitoring reports, including monthly performance reports for different types of files and tracked performance data against the longest running cases. For example, a summary report at the end of March 2024 showed that the overall work queue (all unallocated files) stood at 3,232 cases, a 62% increase from March 2023. The work queue was 3.9 weeks, while the March 2023 work queue was 2.3 weeks.
- 4.14 While Inspectors are very aware of Judicial, defence representative and other influences on case management and progression, there is a real need for greater use of end-to-end timeliness data to better inform decision-making across the criminal justice system and for those parts of the process which the PPS have responsibilities. Inspectors believe this is best done at the CJB, aligned to a shared and agreed vision for the criminal justice system, and then adopted and refined by organisations such as the PPS to enhance their own performance targets and report progress. It would also provide a more transparent and quantifiable way to measure and assess the outcomes of the many Speeding Up Justice initiatives and projects. Potential transformational projects such as Early Engagement and efforts to increase the proportion of early guilty pleas in the Crown Court would benefit from agreed measures of performance.
- 4.15 The PPS and PSNI File Quality and Disclosure Working Group has provided a template for developing a joint proportionate approach to case progression by the setting of agreed file build standards for indictable volume crime cases and earlier engagement by Prosecutors. A Summary Gateway Pilot for less serious volume crime cases, which was followed by its application for cases in the PPS Serious Crime Unit, found positive outcomes in terms of timeliness and best use of resources. Inspectors were told that Prosecutors required less time to re-read files and frequently did not have to request and await PSNI responses to Decision Information Requests. Scaling up the Gateway pilot to include a wider range of cases such as domestic abuse offences and all not guilty anticipated plea cases should make a positive difference. That project forms a key part of the successful Transformation Fund bid and is expected to finance an increase in Senior Prosecutors.

²⁸ PPS and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Statistical Bulletin 2024/25, July 2025* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2025-07/Statistical%20Bulletin%202024-25.pdf>

- 4.16 Benchmarking or comparing practices with other jurisdictions, particularly the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales, provides alternative approaches to measuring performance and the achievement of outcomes. An Inspectorate report found significant differences in performance across different Crown Prosecution Service Areas based on an analysis of the added value of good and proactive prosecution decision-making and the level of grip associated with case progression.²⁹ Effective grip included:
- timeliness of reviews, including timeliness of any decisions to discontinue cases;
 - effective preparation for first hearing;
 - compliance with court orders;
 - appropriate and timely handling of correspondence from the police, court and defence;
 - timely and effective handling of correspondence with victims and witnesses; and
 - clear audit trails of all aspects of casework on the Crown Prosecution Service case management system.

COURT PERFORMANCE

- 4.17 The most public facing aspect of the PPS has been the prosecution of cases in the Courts – the final stage for the prosecution after prosecution decisions have been issued and all administration support has been provided in key business areas such as Court Preparation (for example summons signing), Court Support (such as Court Clerks and briefing of Counsel) and the Victim and Witness Care Unit. The reduced presence of PPS Public Prosecutors in the Courts led to the use of more temporary legal staff in the Magistrates' Courts and greater use of Counsel in both the Crown and the Magistrates' Courts. Temporary Public Prosecutors were more likely to be used for Court work as they did not have the authority to direct prosecution decisions. But Inspectors were also told by Public Prosecutors that insufficient training was provided to temporary staff for Court work. Data on whether the use of temporary Public Prosecutors had led to increased adjournments or less productive engagement with defence representatives was not available to Inspectors.
- 4.18 Efforts to assess the performance of the PPS in the Courts have been problematic, caused in part by the absence of an agreed set of standards or quality criteria and also by resource constraints to do this work. Senior leaders accepted that there had been a gap in their management of Court performance and were sometimes reliant on feedback from the legal profession and the Judiciary, when more serious concerns were reported. Members of the Bar confirmed to Inspectors that they had not been approached by the PPS regarding the monitoring and performance of Counsel in the Courts. The increasing reputational risk to the PPS had not been fully considered by the PPS at the time of fieldwork.

²⁹ HMCPsi, *Area Inspection Programme A follow-up inspection of the quality of the magistrates' courts and Crown Court casework in the 14 Crown Prosecution Service Areas in England and Wales, January 2025* available at <https://hmcpsi.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/report/area-inspection-programme-2/>

- 4.19 The PPS have tested ways to best assess performance in the Court. The PPS confirmed that they had commissioned some observational work to monitor performance of Counsel, though there was a view that Court observation was not a helpful performance management tool. They have also used advocacy monitors – three Grade 7 staff within its Policy Unit undertook Court visits to monitor the standard of advocacy – though they were redeployed to other operational work. The scope for Assistant Directors to attend some Courts was also under consideration prior to this inspection.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should design and implement a Quality Assurance Framework to measure performance in the Courts. The Framework should utilise quantitative (costs) and qualitative data to assess all aspects of the Service Delivery Model for its work in the Courts.

Quality of Service to Victims and Witnesses

- 4.20 Improving the quality of service to victims and witnesses is a stated Minister of Justice priority and has been a key priority for the PPS and other criminal justice organisations including the PSNI that has stated victim focus as a priority in the current Policing Plan. The improvements needed to ensure every victim and witness has access to Victim Charter and Witness Charter rights as a minimum has been reported in many CJI thematic Inspections and Follow-Up Reviews. For example, in 2020 CJI published a report following its inspection titled *Victims and Witnesses: The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*.³⁰ A Follow-Up Review was published in 2023, which found that a recommendation to the PPS and PSNI to review the Victim and Witness Care Unit was partly achieved, but that the unfunded revised service model was a real disappointment.³¹
- 4.21 This is an area of PPS service delivery, which has required changes in policy, processes and ways of working and there was a target in the 2025-26 Business Plan to develop draft service standards for victims which would set out realistic expectations of the type of service that would be provided by the PPS. It was also a recognition that the PPS had struggled to meet the expectations, especially in relation to care and support and the commitments in the *Victims and Witnesses Strategy 2021-24* that had the strategic aim to support all victims and witnesses and to improve their experience of the criminal justice system.³²

30 CJI, *Victims and Witnesses: The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, July 2020* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/nicts-the-care-and-treatment-of-victims-and-witnesses-by-the-criminal-justice-system-in-n-i/>

31 CJI, *Victims and Witnesses: : The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland A Follow-Up Review of Recommendation Implementation, October 2023* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/the-care-and-treatment-of-victims-and-witnesses-by-the-criminal-justice-system-in-northern-ireland-a-follow-up-review-of-recommendation-implementation/>

32 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

- 4.22 The focus in this inspection has not been to repeat the recommendations from previous CJI inspections, but to ensure that commitments in relation to improving the experiences of victims and witnesses are part of PPS's strategic performance management, continuous improvement and the measurement of outcomes. CJI has emphasised the importance of assessing the wider impacts and value of improved services to victims and witnesses and the potential savings that could be achieved across the criminal justice system, in relation to delay for example, by ensuring better needs assessment and support for victims and witnesses in a timelier way. That level of analysis was not available in this and other Inspections.
- 4.23 During this inspection, staff in the Victim and Witness Care Unit were struggling to meet expectations, as most of their time was spent on re-scheduling Court attendance – this was very evident during fieldwork as many contests were postponed due to a withdrawal of services by legal practitioners in a dispute over legal aid funding. There was a general view among staff that they were increasingly unable to deliver the "care part" of that service. There was also a feeling of peripherality with other parts of the PPS with a comment that they were "*not seen as core PPS*" and this was reinforced by difficulties in getting access to case information such as the reasons for adjournments in the Courts. Staff had shared these and other concerns with managers but were unsure how their views were considered as part of the wider management of organisational performance.
- 4.24 CJI made a recommendation to the PPS in 2020 that it should improve induction and continuous training for staff attached to the Victim and Witness Care Unit and that there was a need to reassess the importance of the relationship between the Victim and Witness Care Unit and Prosecutors. The Follow-Up Review found that interaction between Prosecutors and staff and the Victim and Witness Care Unit was not apparent and there was little sense of connection between these roles. Opportunities for joint engagement between Prosecutors and the Victim and Witness Care Unit, to support each in understanding expectations around their respective roles, would have wider organisational benefits and should be implemented as part of the 2020 recommendation.

COMPLAINTS

- 4.25 The PPS has been excluded from the remit of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman oversight, in terms of its complaint handling, due to its role as a prosecuting authority, where complaints may be more complex and include matters of legal challenge. The PPS has established a separate independent accountability mechanism for dealing with feedback and complaints about service delivery by the creation of the Independent Assessor of Complaints role. The types of complaints investigated by the Independent Assessor have included the effectiveness/efficiency of the work of the prosecution service, how a person was treated by a PPS staff member, or by someone acting on behalf of the PPS and any

failure to adhere to the PPS's Code for Prosecutors. The Independent Assessor of Complaints did not have a remit to deal with complaints which were legal/prosecutorial in nature.

- 4.26 The Independent Assessor of Complaints reported that the PPS continued to demonstrate a very positive institutional attitude to complaint handling.³³ She stated the organisation has a commitment to open and honest complaint handling. This included a designated staff team (the Information Management Team) assigned to managing customer complaints and feeding back learning into overall organisational practices. The Independent Assessor found that the PPS was open and courageous in accepting error and conceding where things could have been done differently. In terms of organisational performance management, the Independent Assessor stated that the PPS leadership approached complaints as containing vital intelligence and levers for change as part of its overall quality assurance strategy. An area for attention was the need to consider a new method of complaint handling within the PPS to alleviate internal capacity pressures, particularly on the involvement of Assistant Directors at the first stage of complaint resolution.

MEASUREMENT OF OUTCOMES

- 4.27 Measuring outcomes has been problematic for many organisations as it requires a clear framework to monitor the impacts of activity over a longer period. There is an opportunity to better align the *PPS 2030* vision to an agreed set of outcomes which could be reported annually. Similar issues have been identified in inspections of the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales where a recommendation was made to measure success by developing agreed metrics (internal and jointly with the police) that captures performance with a focus on outcomes.³⁴

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should develop and publish an Outcomes Framework to measure and demonstrate the multi-year impacts of its services and activities in line with the Public Prosecution Service 2030 vision.

33 *The Independent Assessor, The Independent Assessor of Complaints for the Public Prosecution Service Annual Report 2023/24, February 2025* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/publications/independent-assessor-complaints-pps-annual-reports>

34 *HMCPSP and HMICFRS, Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service, July 2025* available at <https://hmcpsi.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/report/joint-case-building-by-the-police-and-crown-prosecution-service-2/>

APPENDIX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

Introduction

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) proposes to undertake an inspection of the management of organisational performance in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS).

The PPS was established in 2005. Since the devolution of policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2010, it has been designated as a non-ministerial government department. The Director of the PPS and Attorney General consult with each other from time to time on any matter for which the Attorney General is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Funding for the PPS is provided by the Northern Ireland Assembly through the Department of Finance. It has offices across four locations and structured into six legal sections and a corporate services unit.

Organisational performance involves an assessment of how effectively and efficiently an organisation achieves its goals and objectives to deliver its stated outcomes. This will involve strategic planning, alignment with Government/Departmental priorities, setting and measurement of performance metrics and activities, matching resources to demand, engaging and communicating, utilising the skills and experience of its people and instilling a culture of continuous improvement.

The focus on this inspection is not an assessment of case file quality, nor how or when prosecutorial decisions are made in individual cases. It is a strategic overview of PPS organisational performance management and the effectiveness of plans and actions for improvement.

Context

Organisational performance management has been a regular component of CJI inspections over the last 20 years, often featuring in key recommendations for improvement. Shared priority areas for delivery such as tackling avoidable delay and improving the experiences of victims and witnesses have provided a much-needed focus on performance across the criminal justice system. In 2017, CJI published *Made to Measure: The Availability and Use of Management and Performance Management Information in the Criminal Justice System*¹. This inspection highlighted the effectiveness

of the criminal justice system in measuring inputs and outputs but raised concerns about ineffectiveness in measuring the impact of activities or achievement of outcomes. With the focus on Government and public services towards an outcomes-based approach, effective performance management was cited as a key tool in achieving improved outcomes.² This inspection called for improved performance measures, a longer-term approach to reporting and effective oversight and accountability frameworks within organisations and across the criminal justice system.

Since 2006, CJI has published a series of reports highlighting concerns regarding the persistence of avoidable delay^{3,4} within the criminal justice system. CJI's 2023 report on *'File Quality, Disclosure and Case Progression and Trial Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic'*⁵ confirmed the inter-dependencies between poor quality cases files, the timeliness of PPS decision making, poor disclosure practices and repeated Court adjournments. CJI recommendations made in 2015⁶ were repeated including the need for a Joint PPS/Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Performance Framework and the development of effective performance indicators.

A 2013 CJI inspection of corporate governance in the PPS provided a focus on improving organisational and business performance.⁷ Making three Strategic Recommendations, this report highlighted the need for effective performance management including the establishment of an effective benchmarking framework, an objective assessment process for PPS Prosecutors and a review of the capacity model⁸ to incorporate a wider range of management information. A 2018 Follow-Up Review⁹ assessed two of these recommendations as achieved, with the assessment process for PPS Prosecutors partially achieved.

In more recent times the PPS has been publicly criticised for being too slow in making prosecutorial decisions and progressing cases to trial, particularly in high profile and complex legacy cases. This is against a backdrop of often cited resource pressures, embedded hybrid working and criminal justice system COVID-19 pandemic (pandemic) recovery for the PPS.

Accountability for service quality and managing organisational performance in the PPS has two key aspects: through joint criminal justice system initiatives, mainly led and co-ordinated by the Criminal Justice Board, and secondly through internal organisational business planning and projects. Recovering from the pandemic and speeding up justice have been priorities for the Criminal Justice Board with the PPS leading a project on securing early engagement between Investigators and Prosecutors as well as defence representatives to reduce avoidable delays. At the same time, the *PPS 2030* strategy has set a pathway for effective utilisation and matching budget and resources to known demands. PPS data shows a falling trend in cases received over the past decade and a corresponding reduction in decisions made by Prosecutors. The PPS had reported an increasing complexity in case types (when road traffic cases are excluded). As part of an effort to reduce demand, the PPS have also worked with the PSNI on a 'no prosecution' pilot where Investigating Officers were no longer required to submit files to the PPS for consideration where a 'no prosecution' recommendation¹⁰ was made in agreed categories of cases.

Aims of the Inspection

This inspection will assess the effectiveness of the management of organisational performance in the PPS, including how the PPS assures itself and others of its performance, communicates this internally and externally, plans and takes action for improvement. The broad aims of the Inspection are to:

- evaluate the PPS's strategic plans, their alignment with criminal justice system priorities and outcomes and their clarity and relevance to PPS staff, service delivery and performance;
- review the PPS governance structures and accountability mechanisms;
- examine leadership effectiveness in fostering a performance orientated culture including effectiveness of engagement and communication;
- evaluate the PPS's organisational structure and its alignment with strategic goals;
- analyse and evaluate the allocation and utilisation of resources;
- examine the existing organisational performance management systems, processes and tools;
- assess the effectiveness of organisational performance outcomes, how they are communicated in the PPS and externally and their role in decision-making; and
- examine the quality assurance measures and continuous improvement practices including learning and scope for benchmarking with other Prosecutorial services.

Any other matters of significance arising during the course of the inspection, if considered appropriate by CJI, may also be included. As the inspection progresses, Inspectors may determine it necessary to focus on a specific aspect of the Terms of Reference while always adopting a risk-based approach.

Methodology

This inspection will be based on the CJI Inspection Framework. 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 at [The Inspection Process](#) on our website.

Design and Planning

Preliminary research

All relevant documentation including corporate strategies and business plans, external reports, minutes of meetings, performance management, financial management and monitoring information, risk registers, internal and external survey results and any other relevant internal reviews, papers and correspondence will be requested and reviewed. Relevant benchmarking documentation and best practice evidence regarding the delivery of prosecution services in other jurisdictions will also be collated and reviewed.

Contact with agencies

A planning meeting will be held with the PPS and Terms of Reference will be prepared and shared with the PPS and the Department of Justice (DoJ).

Delivery

External expertise

Specialist external expertise will be sought from HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate to act in an advisory capacity to CJI Inspectors.

Stakeholder consultation

CJI will consult with stakeholder organisations, including:

- Lady Chief Justice's Office;
- Attorney General for Northern Ireland;
- PSNI;
- DoJ;
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland Prison Service;
- Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service;
- Bar Library;
- Law Society of Northern Ireland;
- Victim Support Northern Ireland;
- Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime; and
- Trade Unions in the PPS.

Self-assessment

A bespoke self-assessment will be requested from the PPS and relevant supporting documentation supplied. The PPS will be asked to nominate a liaison officer for the purposes of this inspection.

Development of fieldwork plan

The views of PPS staff are an integral part of this inspection and will be gathered by a bespoke online survey and/or access to raw data survey results conducted separately as part of a recent review of the PPS. The PPS self-assessment will guide Inspectors on the added value of a survey.

A series of one-to-one interviews will be conducted with senior leaders in the PPS alongside focus groups with staff members across different grades, departments and offices. These will be used to give Inspectors an insight into the organisation, the development and dissemination of corporate strategic aims and objectives and delivery against these, as well as the use of performance information to inform decision-making and improvement plans.

Initial feedback to agency.

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 PPS.

Drafting of report

Following completion of the fieldwork and data analysis a draft report will be shared with the PPS for factual accuracy check. The Chief Inspector will invite the PPS 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. The Inspection Report will be shared, under embargo, in advance of the publication date with the PPS.

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 PPS and DoJ prior to publication and release.

Indicative Timetable

Scoping/Research: July-August 2024.

Stakeholder consultation: August-September 2024.

PPS self-assessment completed: September 2024.

Fieldwork: October-November 2024.

Draft Report to agencies: February 2025.

Factual accuracy feedback received: 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.

APPENDIX 2: **METHODOLOGY**

DESKTOP RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TERMS OF REFERENCE AND QUESTION AREAS

Reports, statistics and other documents (including previous Inspection Reports) relevant to the governance and operation of the PPS were reviewed. A number of meetings with stakeholders were conducted prior to the development of the Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference and assessment criteria were published on the CJI website.

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENT REVIEW

The PPS were invited to complete a self-assessment template against the CJI Inspection Framework areas of Strategy and Governance, Delivery and Outcomes. All of this material was reviewed and used to inform the fieldwork plan and interview question sets.

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork with the PPS:

- Director;
- Deputy Director;
- Senior Assistant Directors (x2);
- Assistant Directors Focus Group;
- Senior Public Prosecutors Focus Groups;
- Public Prosecutors Focus Groups;
- Specialist Legal Units Focus Groups;
- Heads of Business Focus Group;
- Business Managers;
- Policy Information Unit;
- Administration staff Focus Groups;
- Victim and Witness Care Unit;
- Non-Executive Directors; and
- Walk-around in PPS Belfast Office.

Stakeholder meetings were conducted with representatives of:

- The Lady Chief Justice’s Office;
- Attorney General for Northern Ireland;
- Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- Independent Assessor of Complaints (PPS);
- Department of Justice;
- Department of Finance;
- Forensic Science Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service;
- Bar Library;
- Law Society of Northern Ireland;
- Victim Support Northern Ireland; and
- Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime.

ANALYSIS AND EMERGING FINDINGS

At the conclusion of fieldwork, the documentation and data provided during the self-assessment process, additional information requested during fieldwork and evidence gathered from focus groups and interviews was analysed and triangulated to adduce the findings set out in the report.

Emerging findings were tested internally and a read-out given to relevant parties involved in the Inspection.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *CJI, Made to Measure: The Availability and Use of Management and Performance Management Information in the Criminal Justice System*, September 2017, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/f226bf03-e6b3-44f6-b2af-96f4412364e0/report.aspx>.
- 2 Northern Ireland Audit Office, *Performance management for outcomes: A good practice guide for public bodies*, June 2018, available at https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/NIAO_performance%20management%20for%20outcomes.pdf.
- 3 *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>.
- 4 *CJI, Avoidable Delay*, June 2010, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/c0243f51-1e73-47e8-a6fa-344d5f0063c5/Avoidable-Delay.aspx>.
- 5 *CJI, An inspection of file quality, disclosure and case progression and trial recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic*, June 2023, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/b88cbf6f-05c2-4ba5-baff-4ff8e96b897a/report.aspx>.
- 6 *CJI, An inspection of the quality and timeliness of police files (incorporating disclosure) submitted to the public prosecution service for Northern Ireland*, November 2015, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/9faaa7ad-b1a9-4d66-bd35-79ff20848c7c/report.aspx>.
- 7 *CJI, A corporate governance inspection of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland*, April 2013, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/1b8e142e-9f17-41b5-8674-fec5c0521706/report.aspx>.
- 8 The Capacity Model refers to the PPS approach to changing demand. At the time of the 2013 corporate governance inspection this primarily focussed on the resource available to process the cases received.
- 9 *CJI, A Follow-Up Review of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland's Response to Strategic Inspection Recommendations made between 2013 and 2015*, February 2018, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/ca8c5bc9-213d-4756-9eb2-7c5359fce085/report.aspx>.
- 10 A 'no prosecution' recommendation may be made by an investigating officer in cases where the investigating officers determines that the evidential test cannot be met.



First published in Northern Ireland in November 2025 by

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