



## KEY FACTS

# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND:

## AN INSPECTION OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM'S RESPONSE

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A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW OF  
INSPECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

DECEMBER 2025



KEY FACTS

## WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

- Child sexual exploitation is child abuse.
- Any child can be a victim and it's never the child's fault.
- It is a problem in our community that demands a robust response.
- Perpetrators can exploit any child including those who are in care or living at home.



## OUR 2020 INSPECTION

- In 2020, CJI published an inspection report on the criminal justice system's response to child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. We looked at what the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) were doing to tackle child sexual exploitation.
- We also looked at the work of the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Youth Justice Agency (YJA), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and other organisations.
- Inspectors made two strategic and seven operational recommendations to secure improvement, all were accepted.

## WHAT WAS THIS FOLLOW-UP REVIEW ABOUT?

- This Follow-Up Review assessed how much progress had been made in the last five years to implement the recommendations.
- Inspectors spoke with DoJ Officials, Police Officers, Prosecutors, Probation Officers and YJA staff to find out what had changed, how children were being better protected and how perpetrators were being identified and prosecuted.
- We reviewed police and prosecution case files and examined a range of information as part of our evidence gathering and assessment.





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## WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- There were dedicated individuals who were committed to disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators of child sexual exploitation and protecting children from abuse.
- Progress had been made towards achieving the accepted inspection recommendations, but significant gaps still existed that placed children at risk.
- Work on a 'Problem Profile' to better understand the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in our community had been done but it needed further development.
- Data was still not available on the types and numbers of offences and offenders prosecuted to tackle the sexual exploitation of children.
- The PSNI's response to children who were reported missing was not adequate, especially for children living in care.
- Staffing pressures and the redeployment of the PSNI's Public Protection Branch Officers to other duties had impacted the PSNI's response to and investigation of child sexual exploitation. This created a risk for children and for the organisation.
- Further work was needed to embed a 'child first' ethos, to ensure children who were at risk or were being exploited, were considered as children first, even when they were over the legal age of consent.

## WHAT PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE?

### Inspectors found that

- Two strategic recommendations were partially achieved; and
- Of the seven operational recommendations, one was achieved; four were partially achieved and two were not achieved.

There were significant differences in the level of progress organisations believed they had made against the inspection recommendations compared to Inspectors' assessment.

Positive progress noted at the time of the 2020 Inspection had not been sustained.

### 2020 INSPECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Strategic Recommendations

2  
PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

#### Operational Recommendations

1  
ACHIEVED

4  
PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

2  
NOT ACHIEVED

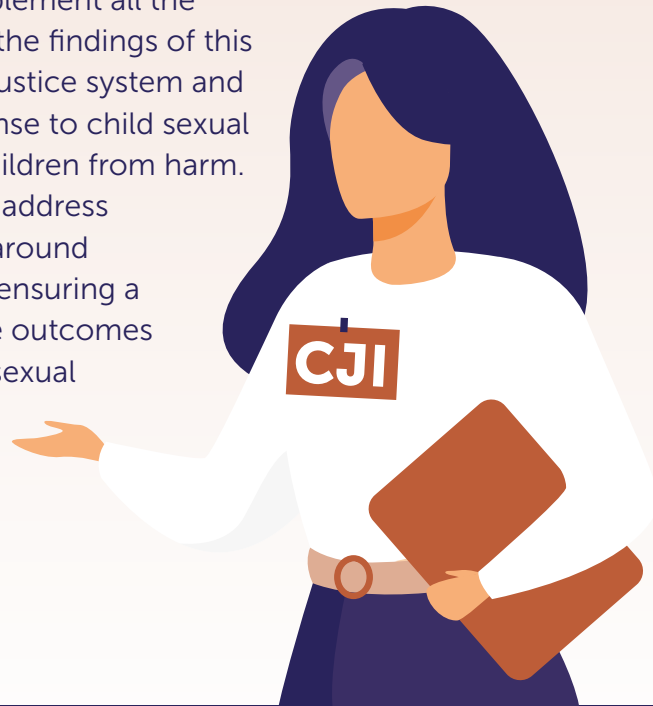




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## WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN NOW?

- CJI wants the DoJ, PSNI, PPS and other criminal justice organisations to fully implement all the recommendations and address the findings of this review to improve the criminal justice system and wider cross-Government response to child sexual exploitation to better protect children from harm.
- Criminal justice leaders need to address ongoing challenges, especially around resourcing, data collection and ensuring a 'child-first' approach to improve outcomes for children and to tackle child sexual exploitation in our community.



If you would like to know anything more about us, this Follow-Up Review or the original Inspection, please get in touch with:

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