



# **SPECIAL MEASURES IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S CRIMINAL COURTS**

**AN INSPECTION OF THEIR  
USE AND OPERATION**

**MARCH 2026**

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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 CJl's control.

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABE</b>	Achieving Best Evidence
<b>CJI</b>	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
<b>CMS</b>	Case Management System (within the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland)
<b>DoJ/the Department</b>	Department of Justice
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>HSCT(s)</b>	Health and Social Care Trust(s)
<b>INA</b>	Initial Needs Assessment
<b>Niche™ Records Management System</b>	Records Management System developed by Niche™ Technology Inc (used by the PSNI)
<b>NICTS</b>	Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
<b>NSPCC</b>	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
<b>PSNI</b>	Police Service of Northern Ireland
<b>PPB</b>	Public Protection Branch (within the Police Service of Northern Ireland)
<b>PPS</b>	Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
<b>REC</b>	Remote Evidence Centre
<b>RI</b>	Registered Intermediary
<b>SLA</b>	Service Level Agreement
<b>Victim Support NI</b>	Victim Support Northern Ireland
<b>the Gillen Review</b>	Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland by the Right Honourable Sir John Gillen in 2019
<b>the Order</b>	The Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999
<b>VWCU</b>	Victim Witness Care Unit (within the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland)
<b>YWS</b>	Young Witness Service

## Notes

References to 'the Charters' relates to the Department of Justice Victim Charter 2015 and Witness Charter 2017

# CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

Police Officers and Prosecutors need to assess and enable access to special measures for vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses as equating to the preservation of and achieving best evidence in Court.

Saying something is a strategic priority in Corporate, Business and Policing Plans and having numerous victim and witness strategies and action plans needs to be matched with sufficient resources to deliver timely quality services. While there is more recognition across the criminal justice system of the vital role victims and witnesses have in reporting crime, enabling prosecutions that bring offenders to justice and help prevent further offending; it needs to be reflected in not only consistent professional practice but much needed investment in services that provide access to entitlements under the Victim Charter and Witness Charter.

We know that what might seem like a less serious offence to some of us can cause trauma for some victims and witnesses. They need to be confident that their needs are being listened to and considered throughout the progress of an investigation and prosecution so that access to support and the special measures they need is granted by a Judge as soon as possible. They then know that if they need to give their evidence in Court those measures will be provided which can help them stay engaged, reduce the risk of attrition and a prosecution not being able to proceed.

This is important for all of us and all the more important with criminal case backlogs, delay and recurring barristers strikes impacting on the length of time cases take to come to hearing and victims and witnesses are kept waiting. Effective victim and witness needs assessments and access to special measures were always important but this has been brought into sharp focus.

This report also recognises the positive improvements that have been put in place, particularly for child and adult victims of sexual and domestic offences, including the welcomed increased use of the Remote Evidence Centres and Registered Intermediary Scheme.

The new Department of Justice Victim and Witness Strategy and supporting Action Plans will be important in setting objectives and targets that deliver an ambitious vision for the criminal justice system to work collaboratively towards. I don't under-estimate the challenges in an uncertain and insufficient budget environment but I do know that a sense of urgency is needed to accelerate access to support for all victims and witnesses who need it.

The recommendations in this report reflect improvements that should be actioned and benefit victims and witnesses now in advance of a revised and funded needs assessment model.

I am grateful to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, Northern

Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and the Department of Justice who supported this Inspection.

My thanks to Lead Inspector, Muireann Bohill, supported by Dr Roisin Devlin, who carried out this Inspection.



**Jacqui Durkin**

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice  
in Northern Ireland

**March 2026**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This inspection examined how special measures, adjustments to investigative and Court processes, designed to support vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses, were identified, delivered, and monitored across Northern Ireland's criminal justice system. Special measures were essential to ensure that victims and witnesses participated fully and gave their best evidence, thereby improving both their experience and the quality of evidence.

The Department of Justice had made progress in developing policies and facilities such as Remote Evidence Centres and the Registered Intermediary scheme. These initiatives delivered positive outcomes, with high conviction rates and strong satisfaction among those who had used these special measures. However, the inspection found that the Department of Justice had not yet commenced systematic monitoring of how effectively special measures were being utilised to support victims and witnesses. Without robust oversight and data-driven evaluation, it was difficult to assess whether victims and witnesses were consistently receiving the support they needed at the right time. The Department of Justice had not implemented a Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service within the Victim Witness Care Unit. This enhanced service, long recommended and supported in principle, was required without further delay to ensure better outcomes for victims and witnesses.

Within the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the inspection identified a lack of strategic oversight and cohesion regarding special measures. Different sections of the Police Service of Northern Ireland operated to their own objectives, and there was no central mechanism to monitor or assure compliance with obligations under the Victim and Witness Charters. Special measures training was fragmented across various courses. The absence of a comprehensive training strategy and effective quality assurance meant that vulnerabilities were not always identified or recorded, and victims may not have been informed of their entitlements. A training strategy and quality assurance mechanisms to improve the development and delivery of special measures, ensuring that Officers were equipped to identify and support vulnerable victims and witnesses from the outset was not evident.

A particular area of concern was the quality assurance of Achieving Best Evidence interviews, which were used to obtain evidence from vulnerable witnesses, especially children.

In the absence of effective quality assurance, the Police Service of Northern Ireland could not reliably identify non-compliance with Achieving Best Evidence policy and guidance or determine whether there were issues with interviewer practice or the guidance itself. This had led to instances where poor-quality interviews undermined the evidence and failed victims. Learning was necessary to ensure supervisors were adequately trained and incorporated regular feedback from stakeholders to improve the standard of Achieving Best Evidence interviews.

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland also faced significant challenges in its approach to special measures. The process for assessing victim and witness needs was not fit for purpose, with low response rates to initial needs assessments and a lack of monitoring or follow-up. It often relied on victims to self-identify their needs, even in cases where legislation provided automatic eligibility for special measures. Applications for special measures were frequently made late in the process, which could increase anxiety for victims and reduce the effectiveness of support. The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland's strategic approach was insufficient in ensuring early identification of special measures and effective quality assurance mechanisms to monitor compliance and outcomes were lacking.

Overall, while special measures delivered clear benefits for many victims and witnesses, significant gaps remained in strategic oversight, training, needs assessment, and quality assurance across the criminal justice system. Evidence of partnership working across the inspected organisations was limited; co-ordinated action and robust monitoring was not adequate or used well to benefit victims and witnesses.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within 12 months of publication of this report, the Department of Justice in partnership with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, should ensure all victims and witnesses have access to their Victim and Witness Charter rights through the implementation of an enhanced needs assessment service to include a Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service within the Victim Witness Care Unit

**Paragraph 2.18**

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of publication of this report, the Department of Justice in partnership with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service should develop data metrics to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of special measures.

**Paragraph 2.23**

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within six months of publication of this report, the Police Service for Northern Ireland should, as part of its obligations under the Victim and Witness Charters, enhance its strategic approach to special measures, to improve the development and delivery of training including:

- reviewing the Witness Care Form formatting and content;
- updating operational guidance on special measures to reflect legislative change and practice; and
- developing quality assurance measures to monitor compliance with the requirement to explain special measures to witnesses so that they can make an informed decision regarding special measures and improve Police Officers compliance in recording details of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and special measures on the Prosecutor Information Form.

**Paragraph 3.8**

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland, through the Working Together Programme Board, should review their projects and service improvement initiatives to include ensuring victim and witness entitlements to needs assessment and special measures are met with a view to including arrangements that are more victim and witness focused.

### Paragraph 3.19

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

Within six months of publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should:

- develop a needs assessment strategy with the aim of ensuring early identification of victim and witnesses needs, timely applications for special measures and an initial needs assessment process that is fit for purpose; and
- include quality assurance mechanisms to monitor compliance with internal processes and targeted outcomes to ensure that every automatically eligible and identified victim and witness has an application for special measures listed within a set period.

### Paragraph 3.34

## OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of publication of this report, the Police Service for Northern Ireland should:

- review Achieving Best Evidence quality assurance mechanisms at each stage of the process so that they are effective in identifying issues as early as possible, to include quality assurance processes undertaken only by supervisors trained in Achieving Best Evidence;
- develop a baseline data set from which to monitor and assess ongoing compliance and improvement; and
- meaningfully consider involvement of an experienced legal practitioner, in Achieving Best Evidence trainee's assessments and quality assurance of Achieving Best Evidence recordings to inform the development of training and guidance.

### Paragraph 3.51

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*“Special measures are not a ‘nice to have’ but are essential provisions for many witnesses and for the criminal justice system.”*

**Former Victims’ Commissioner for England and Wales, Dame Vera Baird**

- 1.1 Special measures were adjustments to Court practices to help Court users, particularly vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, participate fully in Court proceedings and give their best possible evidence before the Court. Special measures were available to prosecution and defence witnesses and were subject to the discretion of the Court. Special measures provisions were primarily legislated for in The Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999<sup>1</sup> (the Order).

## VULNERABLE WITNESS

- 1.2 Under Article 4(1) of the Order, vulnerable witnesses were defined as:
- All witnesses (under 18 years); and
  - Any witness whose quality of evidence was likely to be diminished because they:
    - were suffering from a mental health disorder as defined by the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986;
    - had a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning; or
    - had a physical disability or were suffering from a physical disorder.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.3 A witness who was under 18, on the proposed date of contest, was automatically eligible to apply for special measures as stated in Article 4(1) of the Order. In accordance with Article 5(4) of the Order, any witness who was a witness to the offences set out below was also automatically eligible:
- a sexual offence;
  - a slavery or human trafficking offence;
  - an offence involving domestic abuse; or
  - an offence under section 1 of the Protection from Stalking Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

1 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Criminal Evidence \(NI\) Order 1999](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1999/2789/) available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1999/2789/> [contents](#).

2 Physical disorders are conditions that affect the body’s movement or function.

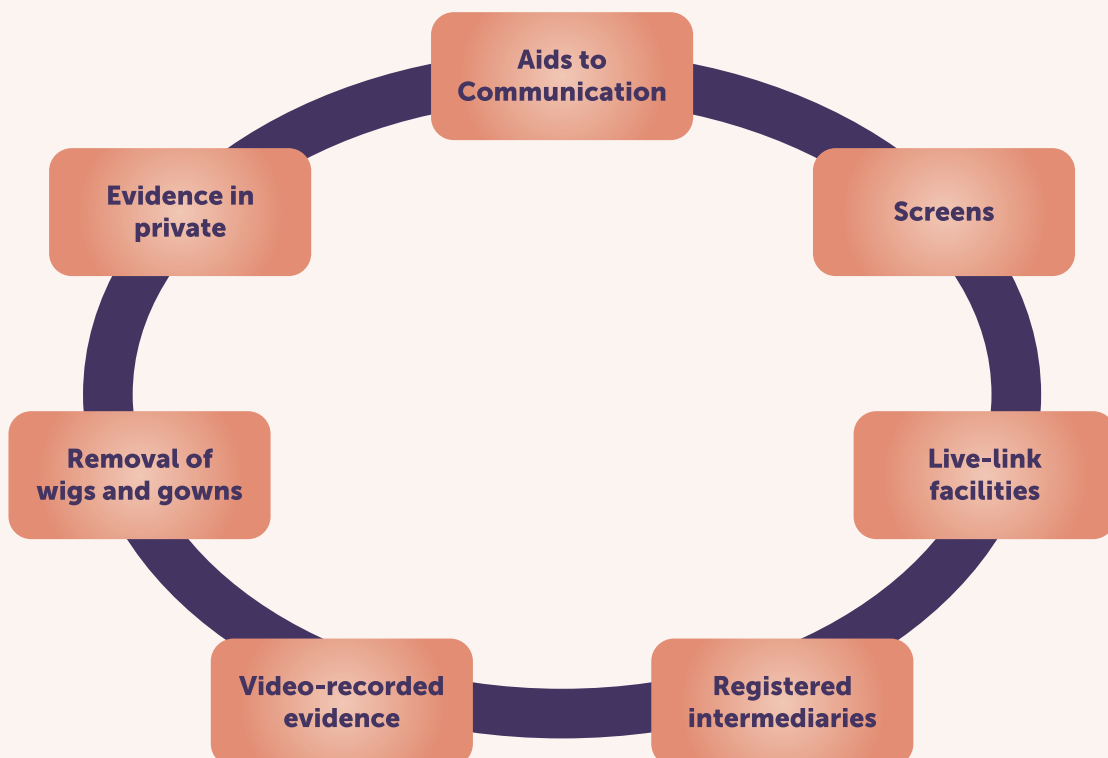
## INTIMIDATED WITNESS

- 1.4 Intimidated witnesses were those who were in fear or distress about giving their evidence in Court. Unlike a child under 18 years of age or a victim in one of the four categories under Article 5(4) of the Order, this category of eligibility was not automatic. Under Article 5(1) of the Order, for an application on this ground to be successful, the Court must be satisfied that:
- *the witness is in fear or distress in connection with testifying in the proceedings; and*
  - *by reason of this fear or distress the quality of evidence given by the witness is likely to be diminished.*
- 1.5 If a witness was eligible to apply for special measures, the Court had to satisfy itself that the special measure or combination of special measures requested was likely to maximise the quality of the witness's evidence before granting an application. 'Quality' encompassed coherence, completeness and accuracy of evidence.

## TYPES OF SPECIAL MEASURES AVAILABLE

- 1.6 The seven types of special measures available are set out in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Types of special measures available**



- **Screens** were available for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and could be made available to shield the witness from the defendant in Court.
- **Live link facilities** enabled the witness to give evidence during the trial from outside the Court through a televised link to the Court room. The witness could be accommodated either within the Court building or in a suitable location outside the Court, such as a **Remote Evidence Centre** (REC).<sup>3</sup> Such a direction could also provide for a specified person to accompany the witness while the witness was giving evidence by live link.
- **Giving evidence in private** involved the exclusion of members of the public and the press from Court in cases involving sexual offences or intimidation by someone other than the accused.
- **The removal of wigs and gowns** by Judges and barristers was available for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses at the Crown Court.
- **Video recorded evidence** allowed for pre-recorded video evidence of a witness to be played in Court as their evidence in chief.<sup>4</sup>
- **Aids to communication** could be permitted to enable a witness to give their best evidence whether through a communicator or interpreter, or through a communication aid or technique, as long as the communication could be independently verified and understood by the Court.
- **A Registered Intermediary** (RI)<sup>5</sup> could be used to facilitate better communication between a witness and those asking questions of them. A Registered Intermediary could be involved during an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE)<sup>6</sup> interview or during a Court hearing.

1.7 Digitally recorded cross-examination or re-examination was also listed in Article 16 of the Order. This is where any further evidence was recorded in advance of the trial (cross-examination and re-examination) and played on the day of trial. This measure had not yet been implemented and was therefore not included in Figure 1. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3: Delivery.

1.8 Legislation over the last 25 years commenced parts of the Order that had been legislated for but had not come into force and also made amendments including the addition of domestic abuse<sup>7</sup> and stalking<sup>8</sup> among the offences for which witnesses were eligible for assistance on grounds of fear or distress about giving evidence. Other amendments included the removal of the distinction between child witnesses in need of special protection and children giving evidence<sup>9</sup>, as well as changing the upper age at which children qualified for special measures from 17 to 18 years.<sup>10</sup>

3 RECs are facilities that enable vulnerable or intimidated victims and witnesses to provide their evidence to the court, using live link video technology.

4 'Evidence in chief' refers to the main facts or proof that one side presents during a trial to support their argument or claim.

5 RIs are communication specialists who assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, suspects and defendants with significant communication deficits to communicate their answers more effectively during police interview and when giving evidence at trial.

6 ABE interviews are video-recorded interviews with vulnerable and intimidated witnesses where the recording is intended to be played as evidence in chief in court.

7 *Legislation.gov.uk, The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland)* available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/enacted>

8 *Legislation.gov.uk, Protection from Stalking Act (Northern Ireland) 2022*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/17/contents>

9 *Legislation.gov.uk, The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/24/contents>

10 *Legislation.gov.uk, The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/24/contents>

## INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

- 1.9 International human rights law places a number of specific positive obligations on the Northern Ireland Executive to safeguard the rights of individuals who have been a victim of crime and witnesses; in the context of those who have experienced ill-treatment, the United Nations Committee against Torture in 2012 said, in their General Comment 3:<sup>11</sup>

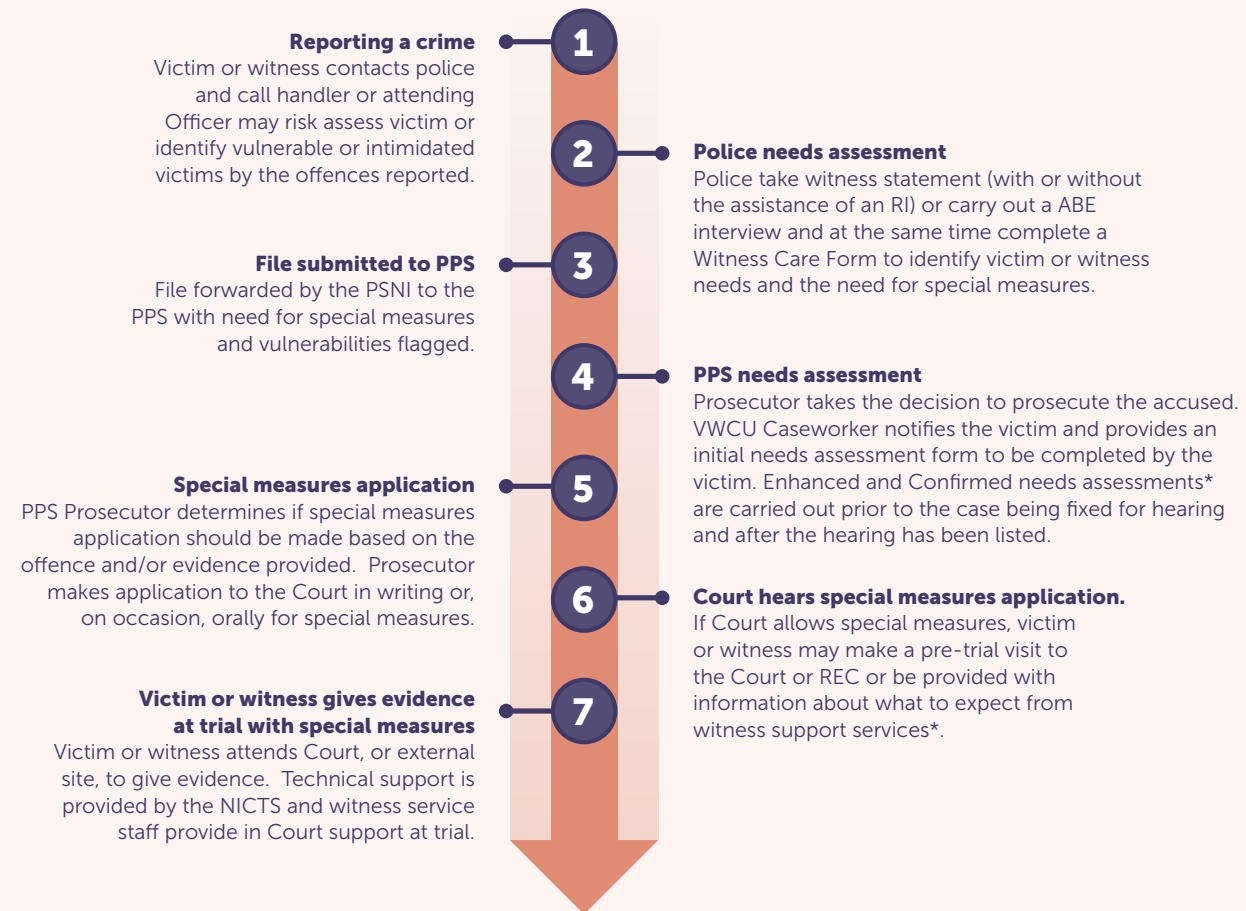
***'States parties should ensure that their domestic laws provide that a victim who has suffered violence or trauma should benefit from adequate care and protection to avoid his or her re-traumatization in the course of legal and administrative procedures designed to provide justice and reparation'.***

- 1.10 The importance of special measures in assisting vulnerable and intimidated witnesses give their best evidence cannot be underestimated and since the introduction of the Order, victims and witnesses have spoken positively about the assistance they received through special measures and the impact it had on preparing them for giving evidence in Court. Witnesses were found to give better evidence when they had a choice about the ways in which it was given. This supported the strong evidence base that procedural justice affected victim and witness satisfaction including the extent to which their participation and voice was facilitated during the criminal justice process.<sup>12</sup>
- 1.11 Similar to the arrangements in England and Wales, each criminal justice organisation had developed its own processes to assess the need for special measures and no single agency in Northern Ireland had overarching responsibility for identifying a requirement for special measures and ensuring the right ones were put in place. Rather, the process began with the responding Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officer and spanned the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) which included the Victim Witness Care Unit (VWCU), the services provided by Victim Support Northern Ireland (Victim Support NI) and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) Young Witness Service (YWS) and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

11 *United Nations Committee against Torture General Comment 3: Implementation of Article 14 by State Parties CAT/C/GC/3, 13 December 2012* available at <https://docs.un.org/en/CAT/C/GC/3>. Note that the Committee considered Article 14 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment applicable to all victims of torture and acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment without discrimination of any kind.

12 *Dame Vera Baird, A vision for victims – participants, not bystanders, 22 June 2022* available at <https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/news/a-vision-for-victims-participants-not-bystanders/>.

**Figure 2: Process for assessing the need for special measures and delivering the measures approved.**



\*Victim Support NI and NSPCC YWS

\*Enhanced and confirmed needs assessments go beyond a standard INA to verify and understand specific needs. Enhanced needs assessment was carried out where a trial date was to be fixed and the victims or witnesses were required to attend Court to give evidence; and confirmed needs assessment after the case had been fixed for hearing but before the hearing date.

1.12 The effectiveness of this system in identifying the need for special measures had been assessed in previous Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) Inspections, particularly the 2020 Victims and Witnesses Inspection Report and the Follow-Up Review<sup>13</sup> (2023) which examined the care and treatment of victims and witnesses by the criminal justice system.

1.13 The effectiveness of the special measures that had been made available to victims and witnesses; inspections and reviews by CJI and others, including the *Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland (the Gillen Review)* by the Right Honourable Sir John Gillen in 2019,<sup>14</sup> had extolled their benefits but had highlighted the importance of measures being used as effectively

13 CJI, *Follow-Up Review of Victims and Witnesses: the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, 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/>.

14 DoJ, *Gillen Review, April 2019* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/gillen-report-may-2019.pdf>

and efficiently as possible, to ensure victims were supported through the Court process, both in preparation for the hearing and in giving evidence through ABE, live link or at Court.

## PREVIOUS INSPECTIONS

- 1.14 CJI have previously carried out an inspection of *The use of special measures in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland* in 2012<sup>15</sup> and the 2015 Follow-Up Review<sup>16</sup> assessed the progress made against the recommendations made in that report. Recommendations for improvement included the development of a witness charter, overseen by the Department of Justice (DoJ), which had since been delivered and is discussed in Chapter 2: Strategy and Governance. Since then, special measures have been inspected and recommendations for improvement made as part of other inspection reports including 'A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Sexual Violence and Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2018',<sup>17</sup> 'A Thematic inspection of the handling of domestic violence and abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2019',<sup>18</sup> 'The care and treatment of victims and witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2020',<sup>19</sup> the Follow-Up Review of Victims and Witnesses in 2023, referenced above, and 'An Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Criminal Court Administration 2024'.<sup>20</sup>

15 CJI, *The use of special measures in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland*, April 2012 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2012/April---June/The-use-of-special-measures-in-the-criminal-justic>.

16 CJI, *The care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*, Incorporating the use of Special Measures, March 2015 available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-follow-up-review-of-the-care-and-treatment-of-victims-and-witnesses/>.

17 CJI, *A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Sexual Violence and Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*, November 2018 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2018/October-December/Sexual-Violence>.

18 CJI, *A Thematic inspection of the handling of domestic violence and abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*, June 2019 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2019/April-June/Domestic-Violence>.

19 CJI, *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/the-care-and-treatment-of-victims-and-witnesses-by-the-criminal-justice-system-in-i/>.

20 CJI, *An Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Criminal Court Administration*, September 2024 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2024/July-Sep/Effectiveness-of-criminal-Court-administration>.

## THIS INSPECTION

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- 1.15 This inspection looked at the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in identifying victim and witness needs, entitlements to special measures and the support provided and the communication with victims and witnesses as they navigated the criminal justice process. It also considered progress against previous recommendations made by CJI (see Terms of Reference in Appendix 2).

## METHODOLOGY

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- 1.16 The main organisations inspected were the PSNI, the PPS, and the NICTS. Stakeholder organisations met with Inspectors to help inform the approach to the inspection and to discuss learning from victims' experiences. Fieldwork comprising focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and documentary analysis was completed with the PSNI, the PPS and the NICTS and their staff from March to August 2025 and separate samples of PSNI and PPS files relevant to special measures were reviewed during this time. Discussions took place with the DoJ and the Judiciary about the delivery of special measures and their effectiveness in supporting victims and witnesses to give evidence. A detailed methodology is outlined in Appendix 1.

## CHAPTER 2: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

### INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

- 2.1 The Council of Europe **Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse** (the Lanzarote Convention) 2007 requires that States adopt a protective approach towards child victims, *'ensuring that the investigators and criminal proceedings do not aggregate the trauma experienced by the child and that the criminal justice response is followed by assistance, where appropriate.'*<sup>21</sup>
- 2.2 The 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention)<sup>22</sup> identifies that all measures that provide protection and support to victims should, among other things:
- *'aim at avoiding secondary victimisation';* and
  - *'address the specific needs of vulnerable persons, including child victims, and be made available to them.'*
- 2.3 Similar wording is used by the United Nations Committee against Torture in 2012: in their General Comment 3:<sup>23</sup>
- 'States parties should ensure that their domestic laws provide that a victim who has suffered violence or trauma should benefit from adequate care and protection to avoid his or her re-traumatization in the course of legal and administrative procedures designed to provide justice and reparation'***
- 2.4 In 2012, the European Union (EU) issued Directive 2012/29/EU on establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (the EU Directive). It was placed on a statutory footing in Northern Ireland in 2015, through the Victim Charter (Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015) Order 2015 and this provided a framework for the enjoyment of the rights protected under the Directive, for all victims of crime.

21 Council of Europe, *Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention)*, July 2007, available at <https://rm.coe.int/1680084822>.

22 Council of Europe *Action against violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention)*, May 2012, available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>.

23 United Nations Committee against Torture *General Comment 3: Implementation of Article 14 v State Parties CAT/C/GC/3*, December 2012, available at <https://docs.un.org/en/CAT/C/GC/3>.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

- 2.5 The DoJ response to meet their obligations set out in the Directive was the development of the Victim Charter (2015)<sup>24</sup> and Witness Charter (January 2017)<sup>25</sup> (the Charters). The Charters cover the services to be provided by a range of service providers across the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, including the PPS and the PSNI. The impact of the Charters in terms of their meaningful outcomes for victims and witnesses was a focus of the 2020 CJI inspection of *'Victims and Witnesses: The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland.'*<sup>26</sup> This Inspection found that *'The full potential of the Charters were still to be realised...to ensure that people received the help and support they were entitled to.'* A recommendation was made for the DoJ, within one year of publication of the report, to implement a strategic communications solution to substantially raise the profile of the Charters and promote ease of access for all users in the community. In the 2023 Follow-Up Review<sup>27</sup> this recommendation was deemed partially achieved by Inspectors. Data to demonstrate outcomes because of the communications work that had been undertaken would have advanced the achievement of this recommendation.
- 2.6 On 28 June 2022, the European Commission adopted its evaluation of the Victims' Rights Directive.<sup>28</sup> The EU Victims' Rights Directive was the impetus for the Charters and, after the United Kingdom's exit from the EU, the findings of the evaluation were worthy of continued consideration by the DoJ and important in the development of any legislation and policy in respect of victims' rights. The evaluation showed that over the past 10 years the EU Directive had greatly contributed to improving the lives of victims across the EU and contributed to enhancing victim safety and reduced the negative impacts of participating in criminal proceedings. The work found, however, victims did not always receive adequate information concerning their rights, victims with specific needs did not always benefit from a timely assessment of their individual needs and they were, consequently, deprived from effective protective measures and victims' participation in criminal proceedings is often difficult or impossible. On 12 July 2023, the European Commission proposed amendments to the Victims' Rights Directive<sup>29</sup> to address these shortcomings and the proposal is awaiting adoption by the European Parliament and Council.

24 DoJ, *Victim Charter, September 2015* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Victim%20Charter.pdf>.

25 DoJ, *Witness Charter, January 2017* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/witness-charter.PDF>.

26 CJI, *Victims and Witnesses: The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, July 2020* available at <http://cjini.org/getattachment/5193b4b4-6351-4987-bdfb-03bace145c7e/report.aspx>.

27 CJI, *Follow-Up Review of Victims and Witnesses: the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, October 2023* available at <https://cjini.org/getattachment/6eca5be7-e517-4072-8dd2-0d54133d952d/report.aspx>.

28 European Commission, *Evaluation of Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council 2022*, available at [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/swd\\_2022\\_179\\_evaluation\\_rep\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/swd_2022_179_evaluation_rep_en.pdf).

29 European Commission, *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the European Council amending Directive 2012/29/EU 2023* available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52023PC0424>.

## THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT AND DOJ CORPORATE PLANS

- 2.7 The Programme for Government 2024-2027 sets out the Northern Ireland Executive's priorities for the current Northern Ireland Assembly mandate and includes nine cross-cutting priorities. The work of the DoJ is particularly aligned to the 'Safer Communities', 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' and 'Transforming Services' priorities. Under the Safer Communities priority, the DoJ plays a key role in ensuring that the Northern Ireland Executive achieves its target to *'...have progressed a Speeding Up Justice Programme and have an Executive agreed approach to reducing offending and reoffending, contributing to delivering improved outcomes for those who engage with the justice system.'*
- 2.8 The DoJ Corporate Plan 2022-25<sup>30</sup> and three annual Business Plans<sup>31</sup> produced during the term of this Corporate Plan set out a number of actions to deliver the 'Address Harm and Vulnerability' priority including;
- development of a cross-Executive Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy;
  - the implementation of prioritised commitments under the Victim and Witness Strategy;
  - continued implementation of prioritised recommendations from the Gillen Review;
  - working with partners to deliver entitlements under the Charters; and
  - delivering an interim report on the extent and causes of attrition in serious sexual offences.
- 2.9 In July 2025, the DoJ published its Corporate Plan 2025-28 and Business Plan 2025-26.<sup>32</sup> It contained five Strategic Priorities, one of which was *"Supporting Victims of Crime"*, the objective of which was similar to the previous Corporate Plan: *'to improve the experience of victims of crime including arrangements for practical support.'*
- 2.10 The DoJ publicly consulted on a new Draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy 2025-30 from 19 May 2025 to 27 July 2025.<sup>33</sup> At the time of inspection fieldwork the DoJ had extended the Victim and Witness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2021-24<sup>34</sup> for a further year until September 2025 and an addendum one-year Action

30 DoJ, *Corporate Plan 2022-2025 and Business Plan 2022-23* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/DoJ%20Corporate%20Plan%202022-25%20and%20Business%20Plan%202022-23.pdf>

31 DoJ, *Corporate Plan 2022-2025 and Business Plans 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/departmental-business-plans>

32 DoJ, *Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and Business Plan 2025-26* available at <http://drupdocs.intranet.nigov.net/DoJDocs/justice-delivery-directorate/compensation-and-corporate-support-services/Corporate-Secretariat/Publications/corporate-plan-2025%E2%80%932028-and-business-plan-2025-26-tagged.pdf>

33 DoJ, *Draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy 2025-30*, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/web%20content%20-%20Final%20Strategy%20%28Witnesses%20and%20Footnote%29%20%28003%29.pdf>

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

Plan<sup>35</sup> set out the DoJ's commitments for this additional year. The aim of the Strategy was to support all victims and witnesses and improve their experience of the criminal justice system and it was structured around four Strategic Priorities:

- *Improved understanding of the needs, interests and experiences of victims and witnesses;*
- *Ensuring victims and witnesses receive the emotional and practical support they need;*
- *Embedding increased organisational focus on victims and witnesses; and*
- *Ensuring victims and witnesses receive the services and information they need and are entitled to.*

2.11 Special measures were included in Strategic Priority 2 and the Plan set out action points that were integral in identifying victims and witness vulnerabilities as early as possible so that special measures applications, where appropriate, could be made. These included:

- developing a process of continuous needs assessment for victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system, from report of crime to case disposal;
- the PSNI, with Victim Support NI, reviewing the current approach to risk and needs assessment and developing a comprehensive risk and needs framework; and
- developing a new service model that will integrate a Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service with the VWCU<sup>36</sup> to ensure enhanced provision of care.

2.12 In March 2024, the DoJ published the Victim and Witness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2021-24 Progress Report.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately these three action points had not been achieved. The current processes for victims and witnesses risk and needs assessment by the PSNI and PPS are explored in Chapter 3.

2.13 The development of a new service model to include a Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service within the VWCU was a CJI Strategic Recommendation, in the July 2020 Victims and Witnesses Inspection Report. CJI envisaged a VWCU model<sup>38</sup> with a focus on enhanced provision of care for victims and witnesses.<sup>39</sup>

35 DoJ, *Victim and Witness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2021-24, Addendum one-year Action Plan October 24 - September 2025* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim%20and%20witness%20strategy%20addendum%20one-year%20action%20plan.pdf>.

36 The Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU) was developed by the PPS in partnership with the PSNI and other agencies. The VWCU is a dedicated Unit, made up of staff from the PPS and the PSNI. When the PPS received a case file from the PSNI a VWCU Case Officer was nominated as a single point of contact for a victim/witness and was responsible for updating the victim as to progress with their case. VWCU's Case Officers conducted individual needs assessments.

37 DoJ, *Victim and Witness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2021-24 Progress Report, March 2024*, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim%20and%20witness%20strategy%20progress%20report.pdf>.

38 The VWCU model involves additional Victim Support NI staff being recruited to undertake needs assessment and they will be titled 'Needs Assessment Officers' within the VWCU. The enhanced VWCU unit will then comprise VWCU Case Officers (PSNI/PPS) Needs Assessment Officers (Victim Support NI) and the existing Victim Support NI Administrative Support Officers.

39 CJI, *Victims and Witnesses: The Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, July 2020* available at <http://cjini.org/getattachment/5193b4b4-6351-4987-bdfb-03bace145c7e/report.aspx>.

In August 2021, a scoping paper, prepared by the PPS, the PSNI and Victim Support NI setting out their recommended service model, was approved by the Criminal Justice Board.

2.14 In CJI's Follow-Up Review of Victims and Witnesses in 2023<sup>40</sup> Inspectors noted:

***'Approval in principle indicated support for, and recognition of the importance of, the proposed service for victims and witnesses. However, there had been no meaningful work since this time to map out the practicalities of implementation, to examine options for realising implementation over time, or to revisit what the options or up-to-date costs might be.'***

2.15 It was disappointing that the development of an enhanced needs assessment model had still not been progressed by September 2025 and Inspectors were not assured by the goals currently set out in the Victim and Witness Addendum One Year Action Plan and the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031<sup>41</sup> and Action Plan Year 1-3.<sup>42</sup>

2.16 When the 2021-24 Victim and Witness Strategy was published in 2021, the Minister of Justice advised that it would *'ensure that victims and witnesses receive more effective emotional and practical support, both as they recover from the impact of crime, and as they engage with the criminal justice system'*. Safeguarding victims and witnesses' Charter entitlements within the criminal justice system was imperative and in approving the proposed model it was accepted that it would help support and meet the needs of victims and witnesses and lead to better outcomes for them. Inspectors were well aware of budget constraints across the criminal justice system but CJI had highlighted in the Follow-Up Review of Victims and Witnesses *'...the potential savings that could be achieved across the system, in relation to delay for example, by ensuring better needs assessment and support for victims and witnesses in a timelier way'*, however, there was no evidence that these benefits had been costed and considered at the time of this inspection.

2.17 Criminal justice organisations were still supportive of the proposed VWCU needs assessment model, however, given the passage of time since the scoping paper was drafted, it was accepted that the paper needed to be updated, to include costings around potential savings. Inspectors considered that the enhanced needs assessment service should be implemented, without further delay, to ensure better outcomes for victims and witnesses.

40 CJI, *Follow-Up Review of Victims and Witnesses: the Care and Treatment of Victims and Witnesses by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, October 2023* available at <https://cjini.org/getattachment/6eca5be7-e517-4072-8dd2-0d54133d952d/report.aspx>.

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

42 DoJ, *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Action Plan Year 1-3, September 2024* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/domestic-and-sexual-abuse-strategy-2024-2031>

- 2.18 The DoJ advised Inspectors in October 2025 that they had submitted a cross departmental funding application to The Executive Office Transformation Fund for the Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service and were awaiting a decision. If this funding is not available, the DoJ need to secure appropriate funds for this long-awaited and much needed service.

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

**Within 12 months of publication of this report, the Department of Justice in partnership with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland should ensure all victims and witnesses have access to their Victim and Witness Charter rights through the implementation of an enhanced needs assessment service to include a Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service within the Victim Witness Care Unit.**

## GOVERNANCE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIAL MEASURES IN SUPPORTING VICTIMS

- 2.19 The DoJ had put governance and monitoring arrangements in place around RIs and RECs, to inform future policy and potential expansion of the RECs. The DoJ advised that this was within the control of operational agencies including the PSNI and the PPS. A number of Victim Support NI services and the NSPCC YWS had been funded by the DoJ to support victims through the criminal justice process, including the use of special measures. The DoJ had maintained governance procedures and performance metrics around this work (data in respect of the RECs and RIs is analysed in Chapter 3: Delivery and Chapter 4: Outcomes). From a strategic perspective, however, in terms of the wider application and delivery of special measures, the DoJ had not monitored the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in ensuring victims and witnesses had timely and effective access to special measures. Further, the DoJ had commissioned an interim report on the extent and causes of attrition in serious sexual offences for delivery by December 2024, this was not available when inspection fieldwork concluded in September 2025.
- 2.20 The PPS were operationally independent of the DoJ and each organisation within the justice system was responsible for ensuring they were fulfilling their obligations under the Charters. However, to ensure that victims and witnesses, where appropriate, were being given the opportunity to avail of special measures to support them in giving their best evidence, a co-ordinated and joined up approach across the system was required. An important way to inform such an approach was to capture the necessary data regarding special measures at each stage of the justice process. The DoJ's Corporate Plan 2025-28 and Business Plan 2025-26<sup>43</sup> stated that delivery of their priorities was underpinned by a number of 'enablers' one of which was to '*optimise the use of data to inform evidence-based policy decisions*'.

43 DoJ, Corporate Plan 2025-28 and Business Plan 2025-26 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/corporate%20business%20plan%20%202025-28%20and%202025-2026.pdf>

2.21 During fieldwork, Inspectors made requests for specific data from criminal justice organisations. Some of the data requested was available but other data was not available without a manual trawl and the data set was so large it would not have been achievable for the organisation to extract it. For other data requested, the organisations were capturing it, but they were not currently using it to inform their decision making. It was, however, made available to Inspectors, to inform how special measures were being utilised to support victims and witnesses. For example, the PPS and the NICTS were capturing data that could be used to inform the timeliness of special measures applications from the first Court date, the application hearing date and the date of granting/refusal of same. However, this data was not being sought or monitored to determine the effectiveness of the special measures process. The outworkings of this data is discussed further in Chapter 3: Delivery and Chapter 4: Outcomes.

2.22 In comparison, in December 2023 the Justice Directorate in Scotland published its Vulnerable Witnesses Act - section 9: report.<sup>44</sup> In this report they assessed the effectiveness of the special measure, 'Evidence by Commissioner'<sup>45</sup>. They selected 2017 data to use as a baseline for Evidence by Commissioner to support future performance monitoring around the use of pre-recorded evidence in the High Court. Using the data, they determined the total number of applications for Evidence by Commissioner and calculated the percentage of child witnesses and vulnerable adult witnesses. In tracking these applications through the Court system, they determined:

- those that progressed to a procedural hearing for an Evidence by Commissioner application to be determined by the Court;
- those that did not progress and the reasons why;
- of the applications that progressed to a procedural hearing, the number that were approved by the Court;
- the number that progressed to an Evidence by Commissioner hearing;
- the number that did not progress to an Evidence by Commissioner hearing and the reasons why;
- the number of Evidence by Commissioner recordings played at trial; and
- for those Evidence by Commissioner recordings not played at trial, the reasons why.

This data was used by the Scottish Government to inform the next steps in implementing pre-recorded evidence for a wider cohort of vulnerable witnesses.

44 Justice Directorate, Scotland, *Vulnerable Witnesses Act – section 9: report, December 2023*, available at <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2023/12/report-respect-section-9-vulnerable-witnesses-act/documents/vulnerable-witnesses-act-section-9-report/vulnerable-witnesses-act-section-9-report/govscot%3Adocument/vulnerable-witnesses-act-section-9-report.pdf>.

45 Evidence by Commissioner is a special measure to allow a vulnerable witness's evidence to be taken in advance of a trial at a Commission hearing by a Commissioner.

- 2.23 The Victim and Witness Steering Group (the Steering Group), included membership from Northern Ireland's criminal justice organisations and key delivery partners, including victim representatives. The Steering Group oversaw the development of the Draft Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy 2025–2030, consultation which closed in September 2025 and will have responsibility for overseeing delivery of the final strategy and subsequent action plans when they are published. Commencement of data capturing and monitoring by the DoJ of special measures will assist the Steering Group to determine next steps for strategy delivery actions on victim support and special measures and provide key performance indicators to inform the Criminal Justice Board

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

**Within six months of publication of this report, the Department of Justice, in partnership with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service should develop data metrics to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of special measures.**

### The PSNI

- 2.24 In April 2025, the PSNI published the *Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025-30 and Annual Performance Plan 2025-26* (the Plan).<sup>46</sup> The Plan outlines three outcomes that policing aims to deliver. Relevant to this Inspection is Outcome 1: PSNI is victim focused. The Plan states '*Victims of crime will be treated with compassion and respect and kept informed in line with the principles of the Victim Charter for Northern Ireland and a trauma informed approach. PSNI will target resources to protect the most vulnerable victims of crime, including repeat victims.*' One of the indicators developed to inform the PSNI if it had made progress towards achieving a victim focused PSNI was Indicator 1.5: Providing a high-quality service to victims. The Northern Ireland Policing Board had undertaken to '*monitor compliance with the Victim Charter to ensure PSNI is providing a high-quality service to all victims of crime and reinforce it as an essential factor in maintaining and building confidence in policing.*' This Plan was much more aligned with PSNI Charter obligations than the previous 2020-2025 Policing Plan.<sup>47</sup>
- 2.25 In January 2012 the DoJ published '*Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings. Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, the use of special measures, and the provision of pre-trial therapy.*'<sup>48</sup> This was the primary source of guidance for the PSNI. In England and Wales, the Ministry of Justice and National

46 PSNI and Northern Ireland Policing Board, *Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025-30 and Annual Performance Plan 2025-26* available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2025-04/Policing%20Plan%202025-30%20and%20Annual%20Performance%20Plan%2025-26.pdf>.

47 PSNI and Northern Ireland Policing Board, *Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2020-25 and Annual Performance Plan 2021-22* available at [https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/publications/policing-plan-2020-25-and-annual-performance-plan202122\\_0.pdf](https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/publications/policing-plan-2020-25-and-annual-performance-plan202122_0.pdf).

48 DoJ, *Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings*, January 2012 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/achieving-best-evidence-a-practitioner-guide.pdf>.

Police Chief's Council Achieving Best Evidence Guidance for interviewing victims and use of special measures was revised in January 2022.<sup>49</sup> The PSNI advised Inspectors that although this guidance had not been formally implemented in Northern Ireland, the principles had been adopted by PSNI Investigative Training. Inspectors were also informed that the Working Group were reviewing and updating the Northern Ireland guidance which was still under development in September 2025.

2.26 The PSNI's Criminal Justice Branch was responsible for operational guidance, with special measures guidance overseen by the 'Victims and Witnesses' Inspector. The operational guidance developed for PSNI Officers was '*Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses: A Police Service Guide*', published in 2011 and 'Special measures: Interviewer's Aide-memoire' (date unknown).

2.27 The PSNI did not have an organisational grip on what each relevant area was doing. At Inspection scoping stage it was apparent that different PSNI sections, whose work incorporated special measures, were working to their own objectives and there was no central oversight to monitor or measure whether the PSNI were complying with their obligations under the Victim and Witness Charters, for example: the Criminal Justice Branch was in charge of operational guidance; the Public Protection Branch (PPB) led on Joint Protocol Investigations and ABEs; Gatekeepers were responsible for monitoring file standards in Domestic Abuse files including special measures and Local Policing Team Officers were responsible for conducting an initial victim needs assessment at the earliest opportunity to consider if the victim was eligible for enhanced rights and/or special measures at Court.

2.28 Special measures was incorporated in the Student Officer training delivered by Foundation Faculty at the PSNI Training College; referenced by Local Area Training in various courses; and as part of the Investigative Training including the joint investigation training, delivered by the Crime Faculty. Inspectors recognised that special measures considerations cut across many areas of policing and therefore would be included in a range of training materials, however, there was a lack of cohesion around the development and delivery of special measures training across the PSNI, and the absence of quality assurance around compliance with their obligations (see Strategic Recommendation 3).

49 Ministry of Justice and National Police Chief's Council, *Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on Interviewing Victims and Witnesses, and Guidance on Using Special measures, January 2022* available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6492e26c103ca6001303a331/achieving-best-evidence-criminal-proceedings-2023.pdf>.

## THE PSNI AND THE PPS SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA)

2.29 The PSNI and the PPS were operating under a SLA '*For the Identification and Management of Cases Requiring special measures*'. The copy provided to Inspectors was unsigned and undated, so it was not known how long it had been in operation. It required updating to include RIs, RECs and legislative provisions. Inspectors were advised that the SLA was currently being reviewed by the PPS and the PSNI.

### PPS

2.30 The PPS Strategic Vision, *PPS 2030*, sets out a programme of work over the next five years to deliver a more efficient Public Prosecution Service, that will target its resources to those areas of greatest priority and where greatest value can be added. Delivery of PPS 2030 will be through the identification of a portfolio of projects based around four objectives:

- *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.*

2.31 The PPS Business Plan 2025-26<sup>50</sup> had four corporate priorities, one of which was 'External Impact' that included '*the development of mechanisms to monitor how well we are delivering the rights and entitlements as laid out in the Victim and Witness Charters.*' The PPS aimed to measure the number of special measures applications applied for and the percentage granted. This performance measurement was of little value in assessing how the PPS was delivering against its Charter obligations and there were no other metrics in place to monitor performance against their obligations.

2.32 The PPS Victim and Witness Policy 2017<sup>51</sup> set out the standards of service that victims and witnesses could expect from the PPS and its commitments at every stage of the process, including: '*ensuring that every effort is made to identify any specific needs and to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to meet these.*' The Victim and Witness Policy reflected all the PPS's Charter requirements.

50 PPS, *Business Plan 2025-26, June 2025* available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/2025-06/PPS%20Annual%20Business%20Plan%202025-26.pdf>.

51 PPS, *Victim and Witness Policy, June 2017*, available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/publications/PPS%20Victim%20and%20Witness%20Policy%20%28June%202017%29.pdf>.

2.33 Special measures were referenced in PPS policies related to prosecuting different crime types for victims and witnesses including domestic abuse, stalking, sexual offences, modern slavery and human trafficking. The PPS also had specific staff guidance for special measures including Staff Instructions:

- No.16 of 2024 *Use of Special measures*;
- No.3 of 2021 on the *Use of RIs*; and
- No.13 of 2023 *Phase 2 of the Remote Evidence Centre Pilot*.

2.34 The effectiveness of PPS Policy and guidance in supporting delivery of their commitments to victims and witnesses on special measures is discussed in Chapter 3. However, the PPS needed to prioritise the development of mechanisms to assess their level of compliance with their Charter obligations to inform further actions to support delivery.

## CHAPTER 3: DELIVERY

### INTRODUCTION

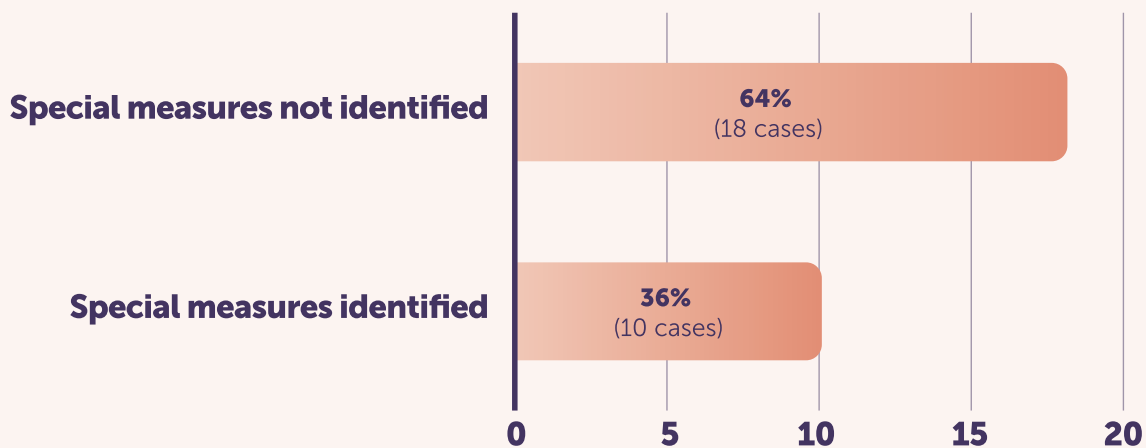
- 3.1 An assessment of the need for special measures to assist victims and witnesses giving evidence began when a victim or witness contacted police to report a crime. Figure 2 sets out the process in place for assessing the need for special measures and delivering the measures approved. Outside of this process, victim and witness needs could be identified by Victim Support NI or NSPCC YWS or other agencies supporting victims and witnesses, where the need for special measures had not been made known to, or identified by, criminal justice agencies. This system afforded a number of opportunities to identify the need for special measures however, it also carried the risk of inconsistency in application of witness entitlements, and scope for information being lost across agencies, as was evident from the PSNI and PPS file review findings.

### PSNI NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 3.2 Local Policing Teams and Neighbourhood Policing Teams told Inspectors that identifying vulnerabilities and immediate support needs was at the forefront of their minds when they responded to incidents. Examples of the questions they considered were: *Was the reporting person a child or a person who required the presence of an appropriate adult to give their evidence or to consent to medical assessments?*; and *Would the reporting person perhaps benefit from the assistance of a RI when making their statement?* However, the identification of vulnerabilities by Police Officers was not always communicated on the needs assessment form known as the 'Witness Care Form,' that was completed when a statement was being taken. This was evidenced by the file review findings and Police Officers interviewed during fieldwork.
- 3.3 When Police Officers ticked the 'vulnerable' box on the Witness Care Form, there was no facility to provide details of the vulnerability to inform the need for special measures, rather there was the list of special measures available. Further, before the categories of 'particular needs', 'vulnerable', 'intimidated' or 'witness under 18' there was a question, in bold, 'willing to testify?' with the option to select 'yes' or 'no'. Unfortunately, because this question preceded the questions relevant to special measures, Inspectors were informed that if the witnesses indicated a willingness to give evidence at Court, the follow up questions regarding special measures were not always asked. Our file review supported this in so far as the subsequent questions relating to needs were often blank.

- 3.4 A further issue was the absence of any information on the Witness Care Form regarding the offences for which victims and witnesses were automatically eligible to apply for special measures. Inspectors found that not all Police Officers were aware of the automatic eligibility offences and other Police Officers knew of some but not all the offences to which it applied. The file review found that risk assessments were being carried out by Police Officers in most domestic abuse files around immediate risk and safeguarding the victim and children. However, overall, there was limited awareness that domestic abuse victims were automatically eligible to apply for special measures. In one instance the Investigating Officer didn't recognise the offence as a domestic abuse offence because he didn't know what amounted to a 'family member' under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.<sup>52</sup>
- 3.5 Of the 43 PSNI cases reviewed, the victims and witnesses were eligible to apply for special measures in 28 cases (25 of which carried automatic eligibility). Of the remaining 15 cases audited, further enquiries were required to determine eligibility in three cases and on the evidence available, the victims were not eligible to apply for special measures in the remaining 12 cases. Police Officers identified the need for special measures in only 10 (36%) of the 28 cases (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The percentage of the 28 cases in which the victim or witness was eligible to apply for special measures that Police Officers correctly identified.**



- 3.6 The file review also showed that vulnerabilities were not always being recorded on the PSNI IT system, Niche™ Records Management System, when cases were opened, or on the Occurrence Enquiry Log where Police Officers input all relevant information and updates in each case. In only 11 files (39%) were vulnerabilities noted by the Investigating Officer. Inspectors found that the Witness Care Form, in its current format, likely contributed to the poor recording of vulnerabilities by Police Officers. However, the evidence also pointed to a gap in training around

52 [Legislation.gov.uk, Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2021](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/enacted) available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/enacted>.

understanding vulnerabilities and the need to identify and record them as early as possible, to ensure victims and witnesses got the support they needed from the outset. This further evidenced the need for a training strategy around special measures (see Strategic Recommendation 2).

- 3.7 The PSNI's Criminal Justice Branch, that was responsible for the Witness Care Form and special measures guidance, acknowledged that the Witness Care Form and the operational guidance needed updated. In addition to reviewing the content of the existing Form, information on automatically eligible offences was needed. It would also be beneficial if the Witness Care Form included information on eligible offences and special measures and regardless of whether victims or witnesses were willing to testify, Police Officers confirmed they had explained special measures to victims and witnesses, so that they could consider and make an informed decision about which special measures may assist them. This would also require the implementation of quality assurance measures to determine compliance and assess the quality of the information being provided to victims and witnesses.

## SUBMISSION OF FILES TO THE PPS

- 3.8 The SLA between the PSNI and PPS stated that Police Officers would '*ensure that vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and any special measures are identified as early as possible and are properly recorded on the file submission*'. The PSNI file review found that of the 10 cases where police correctly identified the need for special measures they only flagged the need for special measures in the Prosecutor Information Form to the PPS in six of those cases (60%).

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within six months of publication of this report, the Police Service for Northern Ireland should, as part of its obligations under the Victim and Witness Charters, enhance its strategic approach to special measures, to improve the development and delivery of training including:

- reviewing the Witness Care Form formatting and content;
- updating operational guidance on special measures to reflect legislative change and practice; and
- developing quality assurance measures to monitor compliance with the requirement to explain special measures to witnesses so that they can make an informed decision regarding special measures and improve Police Officers compliance in recording details of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and special measures on the Prosecutor Information Form.

## PPS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 3.9 Under the PPS's SLA with the PSNI the VWCU's role is to *'Conduct and review witness needs both at key stages of the case and at other times as necessary throughout the prosecution process.'* The assessment process was as follows:
- an initial needs assessment (INA) form was sent to victims and witnesses when the PPS decided to prosecute;
  - an enhanced needs assessment was completed when a trial date was to be fixed and the victims or witnesses were required to attend Court to give evidence; and
  - a confirmed needs assessment was completed after the case had been fixed for hearing but before the hearing date.
- 3.10 Inspectors were told the INA form was under review by the PPS at the time of this inspection. When a decision was taken by a Prosecutor to prosecute an offence the victim was required to complete the INA and return it to the PPS advising if they had any concerns about attending Court to give evidence such as mobility, disability, health or if they had any concerns of intimidation or possible intimidation by the defendant, their family or friends. Inspectors were concerned that of the 43 files reviewed there were no completed INA forms on the PPS case management system (CMS). The VWCU had recorded entries manually on some files on the CMS, sometimes as little as one word, "undecided", but in the absence of further information, Inspectors could not ascertain what, if any, responses were provided by victims or witnesses.
- 3.11 The return rate for completed INAs was not monitored by the PPS, VWCU staff told Inspectors that it was low. No work had been undertaken to understand the low response rate.
- 3.12 The focus of this inspection was the effective identification and delivery of special measures to support victims and witnesses when giving evidence to Police Officers and giving evidence at Court. However, the PSNI and the PPS obligations under the Charters extended beyond special measures and included minimum standards around all communication with victims and witnesses. In addition to a specific time-limit for initial communication regarding the investigation, the PSNI were to agree with victims when it was suitable for them to receive further updates in their case. Likewise, the PPS were required to communicate with victims using their preferred means of contact, at a preferred time of day, where possible, and seek their views on what contact they wished to have with it. This victim driven approach was so important in supporting victims to stay engaged with the criminal justice process. Unfortunately, Inspectors did not see much evidence of a victim led approach during the file reviews.

3.13 The ineffective INA and the lack of victim led communication was part of a strategic issue around the early identification of victim and witness needs by the PPS and recognition that it was essential to ensuring that victims received the correct support as soon possible on their journey through the criminal justice system. The law regarded certain offences as serious enough to automatically entitle victims and witnesses to apply for special measures to assist them in giving evidence. With regards to sexual offences, slavery or human trafficking, domestic abuse or an offence under section 1 of the Protection from Stalking Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 states:

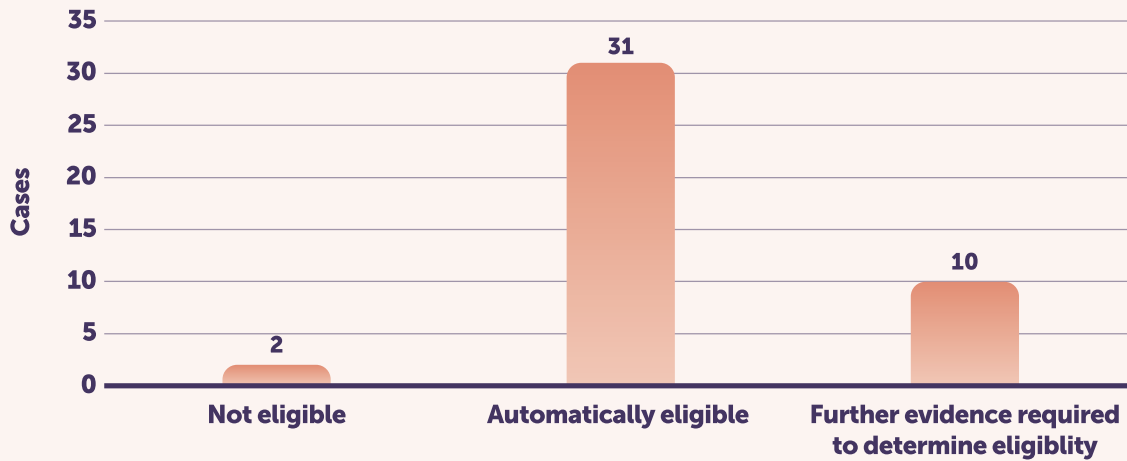
***'Where the complainant in respect of one of the offences that makes them automatically eligible is a witness in proceedings relating to that offence (or to that offence and any other offences), the witness is eligible for assistance in relation to those proceedings by virtue of this paragraph unless the witness has informed the court of the witness's wish not to be so eligible by virtue of this paragraph.'***

3.14 The PPS staff instruction on special measures sets out its obligations under the Charters and the legislation. The guidance states:

***'Where the relevant information and evidence to support a special measures application is available, prosecutors should therefore prepare and serve the application at the earliest opportunity. It is recognised that there may be some cases in which a guilty plea is strongly anticipated, or where there would be expense involved in obtaining the supporting evidence that prosecutors in certain cases reasonably defer preparation of any application until the point where a not guilty plea is entered. However, where the relevant information and evidence is available, best practice will usually involve drafting the application at the time of the direction.'***

3.15 It was apparent from the file review, however, that the legislation and staff instruction were not being followed. Rather, in cases with automatic eligibility, victims and witnesses were being asked to complete a needs assessment to determine if they were eligible to apply for special measures when the law had already determined automatic entitlement. In these cases, the INA should solely have been for the purpose of identifying other supports that witnesses could avail of. Of the 43 PPS files reviewed, the victims and witnesses in two cases were not eligible to apply for special measures, there was automatic eligibility in 31 cases and in the remaining 10 cases, further evidence was required to determine eligibility (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: PPS file review – numbers of cases with victims and witnesses eligible to apply for special measures.**



3.16 Excluding the two cases where the victims or witnesses were not eligible for special measures, out of the 41 remaining PPS cases reviewed, the PSNI identified the need for special measures in 16 cases (39%). The PSNI file review identified that this needs to be improved (Operational Recommendation 1 refers). Regardless of PSNI ineffectiveness, there was an obligation on the PPS to assess the needs of victims and witnesses and put in place supports at the earliest opportunity. Out of the 31 automatically eligible cases, Prosecutors identified a need and considered special measures applications in only six cases (19%) (despite the PSNI having flagged the need to the PPS in 16 cases (39%)).

3.17 The 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 Criminal Justice Board priorities. The Programme Board had identified three priority work strands around Modernisation and Transformation, Out of Court Disposals and File Quality and Disclosure and had been successful in their bid to the Executive Transformation Fund. Improvements to the treatment of victims and witnesses was not a priority area but was included in the Terms of Reference for File Quality and Disclosure: *'In developing new processes and procedures consideration will be given to ensuring...opportunities to enhance victim and witness experiences are achieved where feasible.'*

3.18 Also included in the Terms of Reference were key priorities that provided opportunities to improve the early identification of special measures including:

- *scope for enhanced 'gatekeeping'<sup>53</sup> arrangements across both organisations; and*
- *scoping Early Engagement proposals.*

53 A Gatekeeper is the name given to one of a team of dedicated Inspectors whose role is to review the quality of files prepared by Investigating Officer's before they are submitted to the PPS to ensure that all required information and evidence, as agreed by both organisations, is contained therein.

- 3.19 The findings of the separate PSNI and PPS file reviews supported the need for better collaboration between the organisations to improve early identification of the need for special measures. The File Quality and Disclosure work strand provided the Programme Board with an opportunity to ensure better outcomes for victims and witnesses.

#### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

**Within six months of publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland, through the Working Together Programme Board, should review their projects and service improvement initiatives to include ensuring victim and witness entitlements to needs assessment and special measures are met with a view to including arrangements that are more victim and witness focused.**

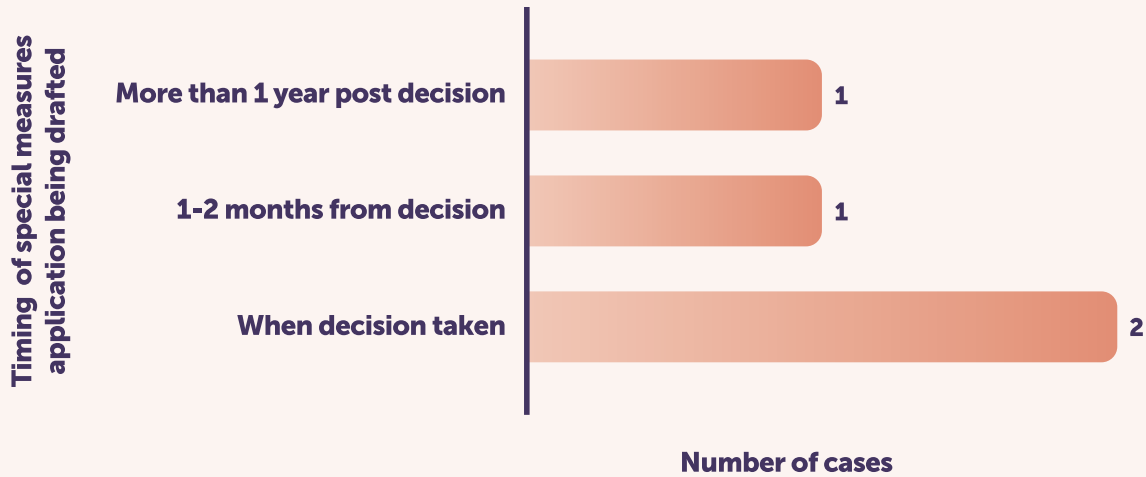
- 3.20 In cases where the PSNI marked the Prosecutor Information Form 'special measures not relevant', the PPS staff instruction No16 of 2024, paragraph 3 set out the procedure to be followed:

***'Where the PIF is marked as 'special measures not relevant', the prosecutor must check whether any of the victims either fall within the primary rule, are vulnerable and/or intimidated or are automatically eligible to apply under Article 5(4) and, if so, refer the matter back to the IO to check why it has been marked as 'not relevant', asking the IO to discuss special measures with the victim.'***

Of the 31 automatic eligibility cases, the PSNI marked special measures as 'not relevant' on the PIF in 12 cases (39%) and yet the PPS referred none of these back to the Investigating Officer.

- 3.21 The Victims Charter states, with regards vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, '... you are entitled to have the Public Prosecution Service lawyer responsible for the case consider making an application for special measures.' It was not known if the Prosecutor considered special measures in most cases which did not have special measures applications drafted as there was no record of them. Of the ten files (24%) without automatic eligibility to apply for special measures it was unclear from the evidence on file if the victim was eligible to apply, the Prosecutor did not request further evidence in any of these cases to consider special measures.
- 3.22 In the four cases in which special measures applications were made, two applications were made at the time of decision to prosecute, one within 1-2 months and one was made more than one year post decision (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: The timing of special measures applications drafted by Prosecutors in the four cases in which they were made.**



3.23 In the two cases with an application drafted at the time of the decision, the victim was advised from the outset that Prosecutors were applying to have measures put in place to support them. This was positive and perhaps assuaged some of the anxiety they may have been feeling about attending Court, helping them feel supported through the process and, in turn, potentially reduce attrition rates.

3.24 Inspectors understand that not all eligible victims and witnesses choose to avail of special measures to support them giving evidence. However, the law had differentiated these offences because of the traumatic nature of the offences and fear and distress often experienced by victims attending Court to give evidence.

3.25 On 7 March 2025, Presiding District Judge Keown issued a circular to members of the legal profession practising in the Magistrates' Court as follows:

***"...grounding statements<sup>54</sup> are not routinely required for applications for special measures in cases involving allegations of domestic abuse, stalking and sexual offences, as per the Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1999, unless on foot of a judicial direction in a specific case.***

***Practitioners should note that the above legislation was amended, as per Article 5(5), to make such complainants automatically eligible, and to reflect the fact that special measures are likely to improve the quality of evidence given by the complainant in such cases.***

***Any defence objection should therefore focus on why a particular applicant should not benefit from this legislative eligibility, in the particular circumstances of that applicant, in that particular case, and should not be couched in general terms."***

54 Statements setting justifications and reasons as to why a witness is eligible to apply for special measures.

- 3.26 This reduced work for Prosecutors and Police Officers in that they no longer had to obtain supporting statements from victims and witness for special measures applications for these offences, other than in exceptional circumstances. It also removed the need for vulnerable victims to justify their entitlement to support in giving evidence that the law intended.
- 3.27 In Scotland, they had streamlined the process further. On 27 June 2025 a new, simplified procedure for notifying Courts of the intention to use standard special measures<sup>55</sup> for vulnerable witnesses came into force. From this date, in criminal cases for deemed vulnerable witnesses<sup>56</sup> there was no longer a requirement to lodge a Vulnerable Witness Notice under Section 271A of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995, (the equivalent of a special measures application), where they intended to use only standard special measures. Instead, a simple notification procedure came into force, which removed the requirement for notices to use standard special measures to be reviewed by a Judge and reduced the amount of information which needed to be provided to the Court.
- 3.28 The PPS advised Inspectors that they had identified special measures as an area that needed attention in recent years. They had commenced a programme of work, that included, in 2024, updating the special measures and working with the PSNI to update the SLA to improve the identification of those victims and witnesses who were eligible for special measures at as early a stage as possible; the updated SLA was at an advanced stage. They had also focused on improving the communication between Prosecutors and VWCU Case Officers to ensure that victims and witnesses who were eligible for special measures were flagged to the VWCU. This involved new functionality on the CMS that would prompt the Prosecutor to identify automatically eligible victims which would then generate a task to the VWCU to contact the victim or witness to discuss special measures.
- 3.29 To capture all others who weren't automatically eligible, but may qualify for special measures, they were also developing functionality whereby Prosecutors could identify a witness as being vulnerable or potentially vulnerable which would generate a task to the VWCU to have conversations with victims and witnesses about special measures. Inspectors were told that due to competing priorities, it could be some time before this functionality was introduced.

55 Standard special measures a deemed vulnerable witness has automatic access to are:

- Remote web link, whereby the witness can give live evidence at a secure location outside the courtroom;
- Screen that obscures the witness from the perpetrator; and
- Supporter to sit by the witness while they give their evidence.

Witnesses under the age of 18 at the start of the legal proceedings have automatic access to different special measures depending on their age:

- Under 12 – a remote web link and an in-Court supporter;
- 12 to 15 – a screen and an in-Court supporter; and
- 16 and 17 – an in-Court supporter.

56 Complainers of specified offences including sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking and trafficking and child witnesses.

3.30 CJI's 2025 Year Two Review of the effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021,<sup>57</sup> made clear the low number of special measures applications in cases involving domestic abuse, since Act commencement in February 2022. Following this, the PPS collected data internally which confirmed these findings. Between 21 February 2022 and 18 September 2024, the PPS prosecuted 5,524 cases which involved the domestic abuse offence or an offence aggravated by domestic abuse. Special measures applications were made in only 647 (12%) of these cases. The next Chapter of this report examines the percentage of special measures applications compared with the total cases for each of the automatic eligibility offences.

3.31 At the time of Inspection fieldwork in June 2025, the PPS's Policy and Information Unit had completed a quality assurance exercise to review a sample of cases in which an application for special measures was made. This was a small sample of files, but Inspectors were advised that two of the main themes drawn out were that Police Officers had not identified special measures in the Prosecutor Information Form and the timing of applications was not early enough in the process. The timeliness of special measures applications being listed for first case hearing from 2020-2024, for all offences, is set out in detail in Chapter 4. It is important to note that there was a significant issue with special measures application timeliness, in 2024, on average, 184 days (approximately six months) from the first Court hearing date to the special measures application being first listed for hearing.

3.32 The PPS Policy and Information Unit had conducted other special measures quality assurance exercises on domestic violence files and noted that police stated on the Prosecutor Information Form that they had not had a conversation with the victim or witness about special measures or marking special measures '*not relevant*'. This exercise then looked at Prosecutors' actions on files received and further enquiries were raised by a Prosecutor in only one case. This confirmed the inspection file review findings. The PPS advised that they would be issuing further guidance around the process to be followed when police marked automatically eligible cases '*not relevant*' for special measures. Inspectors queried the effectiveness of further guidance as the current staff instruction was clear on the processes to be followed.

3.33 The critical issues that needed to be addressed were:

- Prosecutors were failing to identify cases of automatic eligibility and cases where a victim was vulnerable or may be vulnerable that require further exploration or evidence to consider a special measures application;
- when a victim or witness was considered eligible for special measures, applications were being made too late in the criminal justice process;

57 CJI, *Review of the effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/annual-review-of-the-effectiveness-of-part-1-of-the-domestic-abuse-and-civil-proceedings-act-northern-ireland-2021-year-two-progress-review/>

- under the current needs assessment process, victims automatically eligible to apply for special measures were still required to provide information to the PPS to justify their entitlement; and
- the evidence demonstrated that there was a low response rate to the INA process, as it stood, with few victims and witnesses responding, and therefore was ineffective.

3.34 The PPS needed to review their approach to early identification of victim and witness needs to enable timely special measures applications that were much more victim focused and efficient. Any strategy around special measures should also comply with the law on offences that carry automatic eligibility to apply for special measures.

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

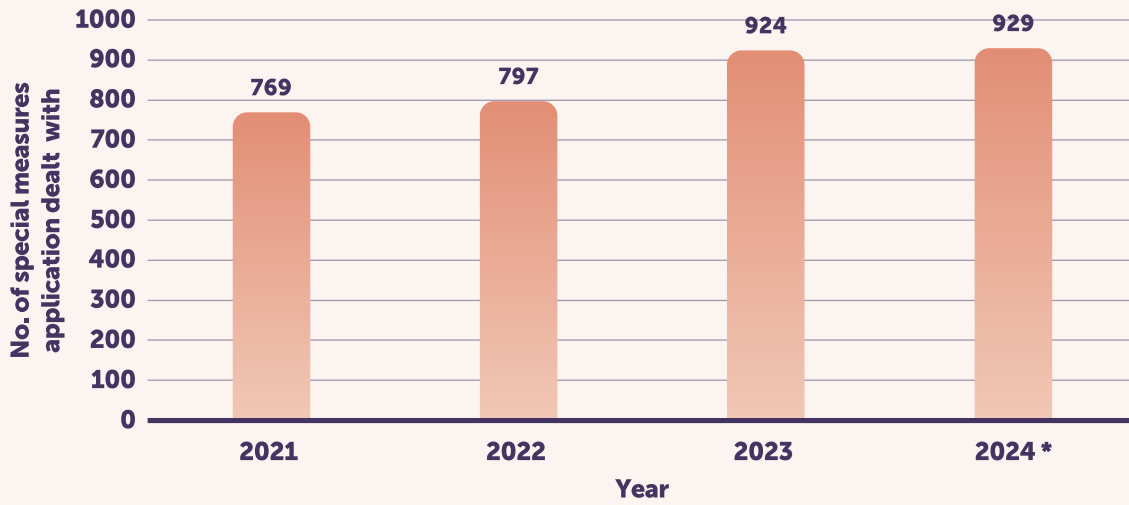
Within six months of publication of this report, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should:

- develop a needs assessment strategy with the aim of ensuring early identification of victim and witnesses needs, timely applications for special measures and an initial needs assessment process that is fit for purpose; and
- include quality assurance mechanisms to monitor compliance with internal processes and targeted outcomes to ensure that every automatically eligible and identified victim and witness has an application for special measures listed within a set period.

## DELIVERY OF SPECIAL MEASURES

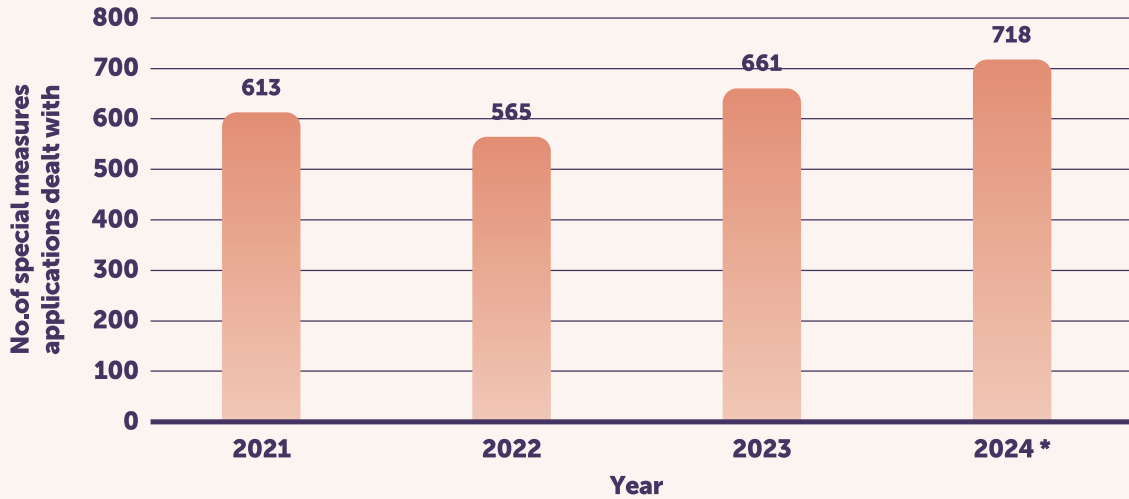
3.35 From 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2024 the number of special measures applications dealt with by the Magistrates' Court had increased yearly (Figure 6). In the Crown Court, during the same period, there was a slight decrease in 2022 but it had increased in the years following (Figure 7).

**Figure 6: The number of special measures applications dealt with by the Magistrates' Court from 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2024.**



NICTS  
 \*Provisional figures

**Figure 7: The number of special measures applications dealt with by the Crown Court from 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2024.**



NICTS  
 \*Provisional figures

3.36 Applications for different types of special measures listed in the Magistrates' Court from 1 January 2025 to 31 July 2025 are set out in Table 1. This figure also sets out the number of applications granted, refused, withdrawn or 'other'. By quite some margin, most applications were for Evidence by Live Link (87%), followed by RIs (6%) and then screening from the accused (2%). There were no applications for Aids to Communication, one for the Removal of wigs and gowns and two for Evidence given in private. Understandably, given the type of offences, giving evidence by live

link was the most common application as it enabled victims to give evidence from a more comfortable and less intimidating environment, away from the courtroom which could reduce anxiety. It was important however, that Police Officers and Prosecutors bore in mind that other measures may also be effective in supporting victims or a combination of special measures.

**Table 1: Applications for different types of special measures dealt with by the Magistrates' Court from 1 January 2025 to 31 July 2025.**

		Outcome				Total
		Granted	Refused / Dismissed	Withdrawn	Other*	
Special Measures Type	Screening witness from the accused	7	4	4	0	15
	Evidence by live link	441	99	28	3	571
	Evidence given in private	2	0	0	0	2
	Removal of wigs and gowns	1	0	0	0	1
	Video-recorded evidence-in-chief	11	1	0	0	12
	Examination of witness through an intermediary	33	6	2	0	41
	Aids to communication	0	0	0	0	0
	Remote Evidence Centre	3	0	0	0	3
Live Link	Live Link for Witness inside the UK	6	1	2	0	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>504</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>654</b>

NICTS

Explanatory note

'Other' means no order was made by the Judge.

## ABE

- 3.37 An ABE interview is a video recorded interview conducted by Police Officers alone or jointly with Social Workers during the investigation and used to obtain evidence from vulnerable witnesses, particularly children. It is then played in Court as pre-recorded evidence in chief. All ABE interviews were to be conducted in accordance with 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, the use of special measures, and the provision of pre-trial therapy.'<sup>58</sup> ABE interviews were conducted by Police Officers or, in Joint Protocol<sup>59</sup> cases (cases where child abuse or abuse of a vulnerable adult was suspected) by a PPB Officer together with a Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) Social Worker. In preparation for cases being heard before the Crown Court, the PSNI, the PPS and the NICTS had entered into the Protocol for Presentation of ABE in the Crown Court 2022.
- 3.38 PSNI Crime Faculty trainers, along with trained Social Workers, delivered Joint Protocol ABE training for the PSNI and Social Workers. PSNI trainers also delivered Police Officer ABE courses. There were a number of separate ABE courses which were broadly similar but aimed at different groups of learners and tailored to their specific needs. In August 2025 there were 382 Police Officers trained to conduct Police Officer only ABE interviews, 245 trained in child Joint Protocol and 144 in adult Joint Protocol. Forty one Police Officers were trained to supervise adult ABE interviews and 65 Officers for child ABE interviews.
- 3.39 The benefits of pre-recorded evidence for victims included being able to give their evidence without facing their alleged attacker in a courtroom, thus reducing the stress and intimidation associated with Court appearance, improved recall by recording the evidence closer the time of the alleged offence and a calmer environment in which to give evidence. Unfortunately, Inspectors were told by defence lawyers that the value of ABE interviews was being diminished by poor quality video recordings and how the interview was conducted, with victims being negatively impacted by this. Inspectors were disappointed to hear of examples where the ABE interview recording could not be used as the victim's evidence due to the poor quality of the ABE interview recording. Some victims were being asked to take part in another ABE interview after, and in some cases years, the original ABE interview had taken place. Other victims had to give their Evidence in Chief in person in the Court room during the trial.

58 DoJ, *Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings*, January 2012 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/achieving-best-evidence-a-practioner-guide.pdf>.

59 *Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child Abuse – Northern Ireland*, April 2021, available at [https://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/files/joint\\_invest\\_protocol.pdf](https://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/files/joint_invest_protocol.pdf).

3.40 Further issues raised by defence practitioners and the PPS were:

- the direction the camera was pointing during the interview which resulted in the viewer not being able to see the witness clearly within the screen;
- the voice of the witness being inaudible;
- synchronisation between video and audio;
- extensive time taken settling the witness (particularly child witnesses) into the process with conversation which had no bearing on the evidence;
- the repetitive nature of the questioning; and
- regular breaks or interruptions where the questioner left the room (apparently to consult with a colleague) before returning to continue the interview.

Victims also raised issues about the ABE interview suites at Garnerville being “dreary” and “depressing” and not conducive to putting victims at ease during what was a very difficult experience, with support services.

3.41 The PSNI acknowledged that there had been interviews that fell below the expected standard. A multi-agency ABE Strategic Working Group was created in June 2024 to provide focus on and accountability for ABE practice and governance. The PSNI were also members of the Crown Court Liaison Committee. In May 2025 the PPS provided specific feedback on ABE interviews. A PSNI Task and Finish Group with PPB and Crime Faculty, Police College representatives was established to review the feedback.

3.42 In response, the Crime Faculty delivered ABE interview refresher training to all PPB ABE trained practitioners as well as HSCT ABE interviewers. DoJ funding was received to upgrade five of the ABE suites (excluding the Rowan Sexual Assault Centre which was bespoke with technology of a higher quality). The suite at the Police College NI (Garnerville) was upgraded as a pilot and included improvements to lighting, new microphones and a drop-down camera to address the issues raised.

3.43 The Garnerville suite upgrade was completed during inspection fieldwork and a ‘mock’ interview was to be carried out and shared directly with the PPS and the Judiciary to seek feedback on audio and visual quality. Feedback was to be considered prior to any further work being conducted at either Garnerville or other suites. It was important that the PSNI continued to seek feedback from key stakeholders on the improvements to the audio and vision of ABE interview recordings to inform future upgrades and investment in technology and environment.

3.44 The PSNI’s CJB was exploring the option of ABE interviews being shared with the PPS through a different evidence management platform to improve the overall quality of ABE interviews. This change was anticipated by March 2025 however had been delayed and the estimated completion date was now 2027.

3.45 The Northern Ireland guidance for ABE interviews was under revision. The PSNI and the Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group<sup>60</sup> had reviewed and updated Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Planning and Preparation) and Chapter 3 (Conducting the Interview). The Department of Justice was in the process of reviewing and updating Chapter 4 (Witness Support and Preparation) and Chapter 5 (Witnesses in Court). Inspectors were advised that it was almost complete. The Protocol for Presentation of ABE in the Crown Court 2022, was also under review.

3.46 Within the Adult and Child Joint Protocol any Police Officer or Social Worker who was Adult/Child Joint Protocol ABE trained, must attend a three-day refresher course within the first year of doing their full ABE course, and then every two years thereafter if they were still actively carrying out Joint Protocol ABE interviews. There was no compulsory requirement for those trained in Police Officer ABE interviews to complete refresher training, however, Crime Faculty periodically ran Police Officer ABE three-day refresher courses. Crime Faculty also ran bespoke ABE interview refreshers for PSNI departments, upon request. All ABE courses required each learner to carry out two assessed ABE interviews as lead interviewer and two assessed ABE interviews as second interviewer/video controller.

3.47 On the issues raised around the conduct of ABE interviews, the training and guidance was clear on the process to be followed:

- the witness must be clearly visible with the camera zoomed in on their face;
- it was the second interviewer/video controller's responsibility to ensure the equipment was continually operating effectively during the recording;
- it was the responsibility of investigating officers to review the recording at the earliest opportunity to ensure there were no audio and visual issues;
- all supervisors were required to attend the ABE Supervisors two-day course and to quality assure the interviews conducted by their staff;
- the rapport phase of the interview should be short and any 'settling-in' was separate to the actual ABE interview; and
- it was not necessary for the interviewing officer to leave the room to speak with their colleague in the monitoring room as they should be using earpieces to communicate.

3.48 Inspectors queried why ABE guidance was not being followed and why quality assurance mechanisms had not identified these issues. The ABE, Crime Faculty Training Overview 2025 identified the following potential causes:

- under Joint Protocol, those who were attending refresher courses should have completed two lead interviews, but this was not always the case. Social Workers in the adult joint protocol environment almost never did a lead interview and were therefore video controllers and second interviewer;

60 [The Strategic Planning and Performance Group is responsible for planning and overseeing health and social care services in Northern Ireland.](#)

- when attending Joint Protocol ABE refresher courses, learners were supposed to bring with them feedback sheets from supervisors so that trainers could gauge what type of refresher training they required. Learners and their supervisors were not providing these feedback sheets;
- Supervisors were often not ABE trained and therefore couldn't adequately supervise the standard of ABE interviews being carried out by their staff. There also appeared to be issues with supervisors not reviewing or dip-sampling ABE interviews prior to file submission;
- many of those trained may not have had the opportunity to carry out an ABE interview for months or even years after being trained, resulting in skills fade which impacted the standard of interview; and
- staff turnover presented challenges, as often those who had developed experience and competence following on from training, moved on to different roles.

3.49 Inspectors were advised that the PSNI's PPB conducted monthly dip samples of ABE interviews and that moving forward the PPB Senior Leadership Team would track the compliance rate for supervisors reviewing the ABE interviews conducted by their own team. Inspectors were not reassured by this as there was still the issue of supervisors not being trained in ABE interviews which impacted their ability to carry out this role; a role that was extremely important given that the PSNI advised *'the critique in respect of ABEs is not related to the training, but is due to practices which are inconsistent with what has been taught.'*

3.50 In the absence of effective quality assurance mechanisms, the PSNI could not effectively identify non-compliance with ABE policy and guidance and whether the issue was with the interviewer or the guidance itself. Ultimately, the victim was being let down, delay incurred and Court time and resources wasted.

3.51 The PSNI needed to review the quality assurance processes so that they were effective in identifying issues as early as possible and replicate good practice. They also needed to commence monitoring compliance with each stage of quality assurance process. Inspectors recognised that it was the responsibility of Police Officers to conduct criminal investigative interviews, but an ABE interview recording was also key evidence for the PPS and Court. Inspectors consider that it would be beneficial for the PSNI to have a legal practitioner, experienced in taking victims and witnesses through their Evidence in Chief, to be involved in ABE trainee's assessments and in subsequent quality assurance of ABE interview recordings through dip-sampling.

## OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

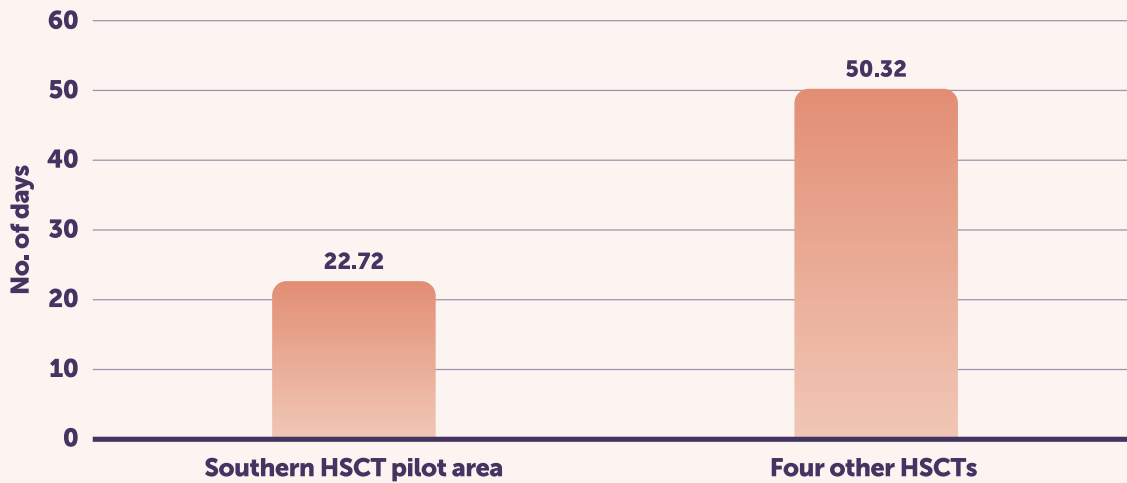
Within six months of publication of this report, the Police Service for Northern Ireland should:

- review Achieving Best Evidence quality assurance mechanisms at each stage of the process so that they are effective in identifying issues as early as possible, to include quality assurance processes undertaken only by supervisors trained in Achieving Best Evidence;
- develop a baseline data set from which to monitor and assess ongoing compliance and improvement; and
- meaningfully consider involvement of an experienced legal practitioner, in Achieving Best Evidence trainee's assessments and quality assurance of Achieving Best Evidence recordings to inform the development of training and guidance.

### ABE cadre

- 3.52 The 2019 Gillen Review recommended that the need for ABE interviews was to be re-visited to improve the standard and quality of interview recordings and that there was a greater emphasis on a smaller cadre of specially selected skilled and trained Police Officers to conduct ABE interviews.
- 3.53 In July 2020 a joint PSNI and Southern HSCT pilot established an ABE interviewer cadre for children and young people. The pilot was to run for six months ending on 31 December 2020. The pilot involved a small team of experienced ABE interviewers from PSNI and Southern HSCT Children and Young People's Services Social Work who completed all ABE interviews for children in the Southern HSCT area. The pilot was still operating during inspection fieldwork in May 2025. It had been evaluated in June 2021 and again in 2024 with recommendations to resource this model across Northern Ireland.
- 3.54 The evaluation found that the average time from an agreement for a joint investigation to the ABE interview being completed for the four HSCTs who were not operating the pilot model was 50.32 days. This was more than twice the time it took in the SHSCT, as shown in Figure 8. Further, the longest wait for an ABE interview in the Southern HSCT was 53 days compared to a range of 121 to 243 days in the other four HSCTs.

**Figure 8: The average time taken from an agreement for a joint investigation to the ABE interview being completed in the five HSCTs across Northern Ireland.**



PSNI

3.55 In September 2025, Inspectors were informed that funding had been approved for the Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group to recruit three senior practitioners to implement the cadre model and roll it out across Northern Ireland. The PPB were reviewing resourcing options, including the use of Police Staff Investigators as cadre interviewers. The PPB secured funding from The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy Oversight Board to facilitate a Consultant Clinical Psychologist to provide training and planning support for line managers and host a reflective space for the cadre staff across the PSNI and Social Services. The pilot continues to operate in the Southern HSCT. More than five years since the pilot commenced, the PSNI needed to consider adopting the pilot model as business as usual.

## REMOTE EVIDENCE CENTRES (RECS)

3.56 The Gillen Review included recommendations, specific to special measures:

- *all vulnerable victims and witnesses should be given the opportunity to give evidence remotely from the Court building;*
- *RECs<sup>61</sup> should be made available in serious sexual offence cases; and*
- *the introduction of early pre-recorded cross-examination, initially of children and vulnerable adults, to be conducted away from the Court setting. In time, consideration should be given to extending this to include all complainants in serious sexual offences.*

61 RECs are buildings entirely separate from Court buildings from where victims and witnesses can give their evidence remotely to the Court.

3.57 RECs were intended to reduce the risk of complainants being re-traumatised by removing any chance of encountering the defendant and/or the defendant's family and supporters in or around the Court building. The most recent Victim and Witness Experience of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System Survey 2022-23<sup>62</sup> found the proportion of respondents who cited concern about potential contact with the defendant or his/her supporters at Court increased from 40% in 2019-20 to 56% in 2022-23; at victim level, the proportion increased from 48% in 2019-20 to 72% in 2022-23.

3.58 The NSPCC YWS in Bishop Street, Derry/Londonderry had already been operating a remote live link to Londonderry (Bishop Street) Courthouse since 2008. The Criminal Justice Board agreed to a phased approach to introduce RECs in accordance with Sir John Gillen's recommendation:

- Phase 1 - establishment of temporary remote evidence facilities in Belfast and Craigavon;
- Phase 2 - establishment of a longer-term REC in central Belfast; and
- Phase 3 - identification of options for the wider roll-out of remote evidence facilities across Northern Ireland, informed by the monitoring and evaluation of existing facilities.

3.59 A suitable location was identified in Craigavon for a REC to service Craigavon Courthouse, and it officially opened in January 2021. It provided fully functioning REC facilities with two live-link rooms, comfortable waiting space for witnesses and was a suitable distance from the courthouse. In Belfast, no suitable city centre properties were immediately available, so there was agreement to establish a temporary REC facility within the Stormont Estate which opened in February 2021. The Stormont Estate facility was closed when new facilities opened in Belfast City Centre on 9 May 2023. The 2024 CJI Inspection Report of the *Effectiveness of the Criminal Court Administration*<sup>63</sup> recommended that within three months of report publication, the DoJ should commence a formal evaluation and benefit realisation of the RECs in Belfast and Craigavon to inform the Phase 3 roll-out of remote evidence facilities across Northern Ireland.

3.60 In April 2024, the DoJ were notified that the building in which the Craigavon REC was situated was to close on 30 September 2025. In response the DoJ carried out an evaluation of the effectiveness of REC provision and whether there was sufficient evidence to justify the additional expenditure of retaining the Craigavon REC by moving to a new location.

62 DoJ, *Victim and Witness Experience of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System Survey key findings for 2022-23*, August 2023 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Victim%20and%20Witness%20Experience%20of%20the%20Northern%20Ireland%20Criminal%20Justice%20System%20-%20Key%20Findings%20-%202022-23.pdf>

63 CJI, *An Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Criminal Court Administration*, September 2024 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2024/July-Sep/Effectiveness-of-criminal-Court-administration>.

- 3.61 The evaluation was largely based on the information set out in the quarterly reports which clearly demonstrated increasing demand for RECs, positive conviction rates and overwhelming support from witnesses who used a REC to give evidence, many of whom stated that without REC provision they would not have continued with their case and would not have remained within the justice system.
- 3.62 As part of this evaluation, the DoJ also conducted research into which areas of Northern Ireland might benefit most from a new REC. They considered statistics including where Victim Support NI and NSPCC Court support staff were most frequently required, where RIs were most frequently deployed as well as Court listing statistics. This research indicated that Craigavon, Newry and Dungannon were the locations that might benefit most from a REC in addition to the existing REC provision in Belfast and the NSPCC led facility in Derry/Londonderry. The DoJ intended building on this initial report and producing another before the end of the 2025-26 business year setting out final recommendations for the extension of current provision of RECs across Northern Ireland.
- 3.63 Falling outside the remit of the formal REC project, a REC Steering Group subgroup was considering the installation of a REC facility (using Sightlink<sup>64</sup>) in the Foyle Family Justice Centre (Centre). The proposal was for witnesses in Domestic Abuse cases to attend the Centre to give their evidence to the Court remotely as a pilot REC. Victims of domestic abuse used the NSPCC YWS REC in the vicinity of the Court once a month for the Domestic Abuse Court and both Victim Support NI and NSPCC provided support to victims and witnesses involved.
- 3.64 Inspectors were fortunate enough to have been given a guided tour of the Centre. This initiative was available to individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse. It adopted an impressive one-stop shop model, offering centralised service provision of more than 20 public and charitable agencies and organisations, both onsite and offsite. The proposal was not due to issues with the NSPCC YWS REC but rather to add to exiting services and enhance the supports currently being offered by the Centre and should be a consideration for the DoJ when rolling out RECs across Northern Ireland.
- 3.65 It was positive that the report setting out recommendations for the roll out of RECs across Northern Ireland was in progress but given the positive outcomes for victims detailed in Chapter 4, equality of access to RECs for victims was imperative. A support service provider who Inspectors spoke with adeptly said *"Resources not being available is the system's burden - not the victims!"* Unfortunately, this was very much the victim's weight to bear, as access to RECs currently depended on their postcode and where cases were listed.

64 Sightlink is a video-link facility used by the NICTS to conduct remote hearings with the Judge, legal Representatives and parties to the proceedings.

3.66 A business case for the new Craigavon REC was approved in early 2025 by the DoJ and Officials were hopeful it would be operational by December 2025. The original facility was available until then.

3.67 In addition to the NSPCC and DoJ led REC, Women's Aid in Enniskillen had been operating a REC for adult victims of domestic abuse since Spring 2024 which had produced good outcomes for victims of domestic abuse. Of the thirteen cases in which the victim was scheduled to give evidence from the REC, two of the cases were withdrawn, and in one case the victim chose to give evidence from the Court. Of the remaining 10 cases, nine resulted in guilty pleas without the victim giving evidence and in the remaining case the defendant was convicted after contested hearing.

3.68 Inspectors were told of occasions where the remit of the current REC's was extended to accommodate victims, particularly children, from Crown Court jurisdictions outside Belfast and Craigavon. Inspectors welcomed this flexibility to ensure victims who were not fortunate to have a REC in their Crown Court area, had access to the same supports that were already available to victims in Belfast, Craigavon and Derry/Londonderry. Inspectors were also advised that discussions were ongoing to try to put in place more permanent arrangements, whereby other Courts in and around the Belfast area could use the Belfast REC for specific cases. The feedback from victims and witnesses who had had the opportunity to give evidence from the RECs was overwhelmingly positive and it was so important for this special measure become readily available to all victims and witnesses.

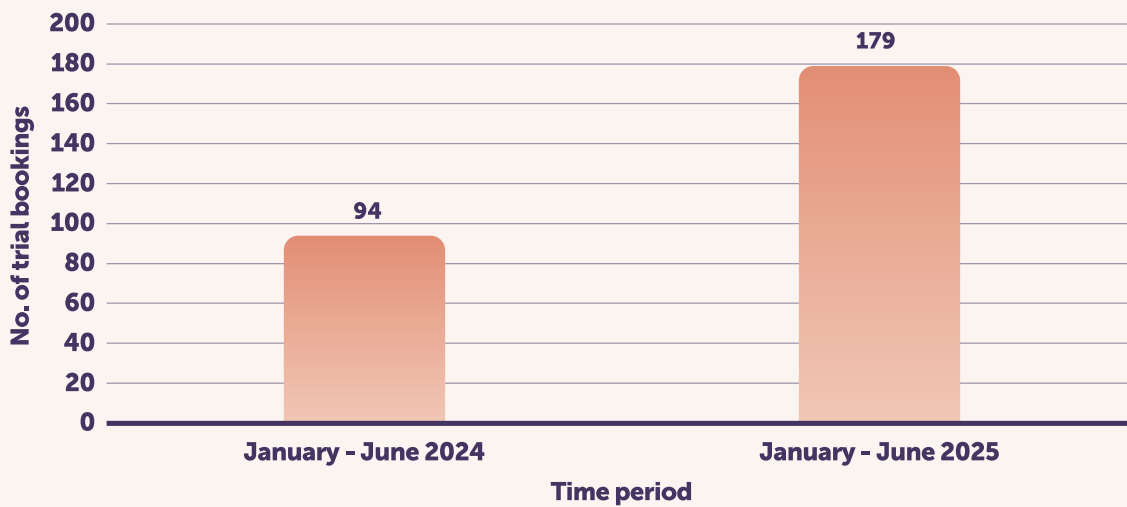
***"I couldn't possibly have faced going to court - if it wasn't for the REC, I wouldn't have turned up."***

***"I was heard but I wasn't seen by him... had I known about this place beforehand I probably would have reported sooner."***

3.69 To coincide with the launch of Phase 2 of the REC Pilot in September 2023, the PPS issued comprehensive internal guidance to staff advising them of the procedures to be followed where a Prosecutor considered that a vulnerable witness, giving evidence at either Laganside or Craigavon Court, would benefit from the use of the remote evidence facilities. Training on the processes, including a training video, had also been delivered to Prosecutors, as well as tours of the REC facilities.

3.70 The overall number of REC bookings had increased significantly. From 1 January 2025 to 30 June 2025, there was a 90% increase in overall bookings compared with the equivalent period in 2024 (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: The overall number of bookings in Belfast and Craigavon RECs from 1 January-30 June 2024 and 1 January-30 June 2025.**



DoJ

3.71 Inspectors were told of instances where a child had been granted special measures to give evidence from the REC, and were accompanied by their parent/guardian to support them in the REC. However, their supporting adult was also a witness in the case, and either special measures was not being applied or the Judge had refused special measures for the adult as they were deemed not eligible to apply. In these examples the child, rather than being separated from the adult, chose to waive their entitlement to use the REC and went to the Court building with the adult to give evidence from the live link. Although there were not many examples referenced, the purpose of the law, particularly around child witnesses, was to create an environment where the child felt safe and calm and was not being re-traumatised so that they could give their best evidence. For most children, this required the presence of a parent or guardian for reassurance and to put them at ease so it was important that the parent or guardian could remain with them in the REC. Inspectors also heard of examples where, in these same circumstances, some Judges granted special measures to allow the adult to give evidence in the REC to be with the child under the temporary provision in the Coronavirus Act 2020 based on the 'interests of justice' test.

3.72 There were proposals for new primary legislation to retain the wider use of live link evidence going forward. A public consultation indicated almost unanimous support for retaining the facility of remote hearings through using live links, provided a Court or tribunal considered that their use was in the interests of justice. Inspectors welcomed the proposals, particularly if it ensured consistency of approach in permitting parents/guardians to remain with child witnesses in the RECs.

3.73 Inspectors had the opportunity to view the REC facilities in Belfast and were reassured by how victim and child focused the facilities were, ever evolving to accommodate the needs of service users.

## REGISTERED INTERMEDIARIES (RIS)

3.74 The RI Scheme (the Scheme) pilot was launched by the DoJ on 13 May 2013. RIs are communication specialists who assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, suspects and defendants with significant communication deficits to communicate their answers more effectively during police interview and when giving evidence at trial. The Scheme was originally piloted in Crown Courts and associated committal proceedings in Magistrates' Courts for the most serious offences. In April 2015, it was extended to Crown Court cases and in April 2017 the Scheme was rolled out to Magistrates' and Youth Courts. RIs could be requested by the PSNI, PPS or defence solicitors. Most RI requests were made by the PSNI (82% of RI requests were made by police in 2024-25). The breakdown of the types of witness that RIs had been requested for since the start of the scheme in 2020-21 is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Types of witness that RIs have been requested for since the start of the scheme in 2020-21.**

RI requested for...	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total
<b>Complainant/victim</b>	602	721	788	820	768	<b>3,699 (65%)</b>
<b>Suspect/defendant</b>	211	384	388	392	354	<b>1,729 (30%)</b>
<b>Other witnesses</b>	55	50	73	52	58	<b>288 (5%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>1,249</b>	<b>1,264</b>	<b>1,180*</b>	<b>5,716</b>

DoJ

Note

\* The number of RI referrals during 2024-25 were slightly fewer than 2023-24 and goes against the previous trend of increasing referrals year to year. The small drop in numbers could potentially be due to the barrister strike in 2025 that prevented many Crown Court trials from proceeding. The DoJ will continue to monitor referrals throughout 2025-26 and report again at year end.

3.75 Figures showed that for 2024-25, the most frequent vulnerabilities stated on the request were:

- Young age 33%;
- Mild/moderate learning disability 20%; and
- Autism 16%.

3.76 The DoJ provided training at the Police College to new Police Officers on RIs. They had also helped deliver the Law Society of Northern Ireland Vulnerable Person Practitioner Course which opened on 10 December 2024.

The DoJ had commenced recording cases where a RI determined they were not required following assessment on 1 June 2023. In 2024-25, RIs assessed that assistance was not required on just four occasions, indicating that service providers were well attuned to when a witness required a RI. There was no information however, regarding whether Police Officers and Prosecutors were identifying everyone who had a communication need. To provide assurance around the RI Scheme, the PSNI and PPS should commence monitoring whether the need for a RI was being identified by Police Officers and Prosecutors when appropriate, and how early in the process the need was being identified (See Strategic Recommendations 3 and 4).

### **Pre-recorded cross examination**

- 3.77 Pre-recorded cross examination was a special measure that allowed vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to pre-record their cross-examination ahead of the trial. This meant that witnesses did not need to give their evidence live during the trial before a jury as the recorded evidence and cross-examination could be played back at Court. The key aims of this measure were for the cross-examination to happen earlier in the process than if cross-examination occurred at trial, and to improve the quality of the evidence provided by the witness. It was envisaged that this would be achieved by making it easier for vulnerable/intimidated witnesses to recall/recount events clearly by reducing the length of time to cross-examination and improving the experience for witnesses.
- 3.78 In England and Wales, it was piloted for vulnerable witnesses and children under 16 years of age in three Crown Courts in 2013, with the pilot extended to children under 18 years of age in 2017. An additional six Courts commenced provision in 2019 and rollout to all Crown Courts was completed in November 2020. For complainants of sexual and modern slavery offences, it was piloted in three Crown Courts in 2019 and had been available in all Crown Courts since September 2022. In Scotland, this same special measure known as 'Evidence by Commissioner', was available to all child witnesses and complainers in serious sexual offence cases.
- 3.79 Pre-recorded cross examination was not currently available in Northern Ireland.

## **AWARENESS RAISING OF VICTIM AND WITNESS ENTITLEMENTS**

- 3.80 In November and December 2023, the DoJ, the PPS, the PSNI and victim support agencies participated in a number of Victim Charter Awareness sessions in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. These were face to face sessions where organisational leads delivered a presentation on the rights of victims under the Charters, with a particular emphasis on special measures.

- 3.81 The PPS was awarded funding from the Victim of Crime Fund in 2024, which was used to create an animation on special measures. The animation was completed in July 2024 and can be viewed on the PPS social media and the PPS website. The PPS special measures leaflet, which was sent to victims and witnesses with the notification of decision letter, was under review at the time of this Inspection. The current leaflet and letter required updating to include reference to the RECs and to clarify the rights of victims in automatically eligible cases.
- 3.82 Also in 2024, the Minister of Justice, Naomi Long MLA, launched a campaign in partnership with the Commissioner Designate for the Victims of Crime, Geraldine Hanna. The *'These are your rights'* campaign aimed to highlight the rights of victims and witnesses under the Charters. The campaign was available on YouTube and also ran on local television, digital channels, social media and newspapers.
- 3.83 This required significant attention with the Victim Survey Report published in June 2025 showing 80% of respondents, who had come through the criminal justice system, saying they were not aware of the Victim Charter before completing the survey

## CHAPTER 4: OUTCOMES

4.1 Victims and witnesses who were granted special measures had positive outcomes at court and feedback to Victim Support NI on RECs included:

*"Amazing safe service."*

*"Having this place was a lifesaver for me."*

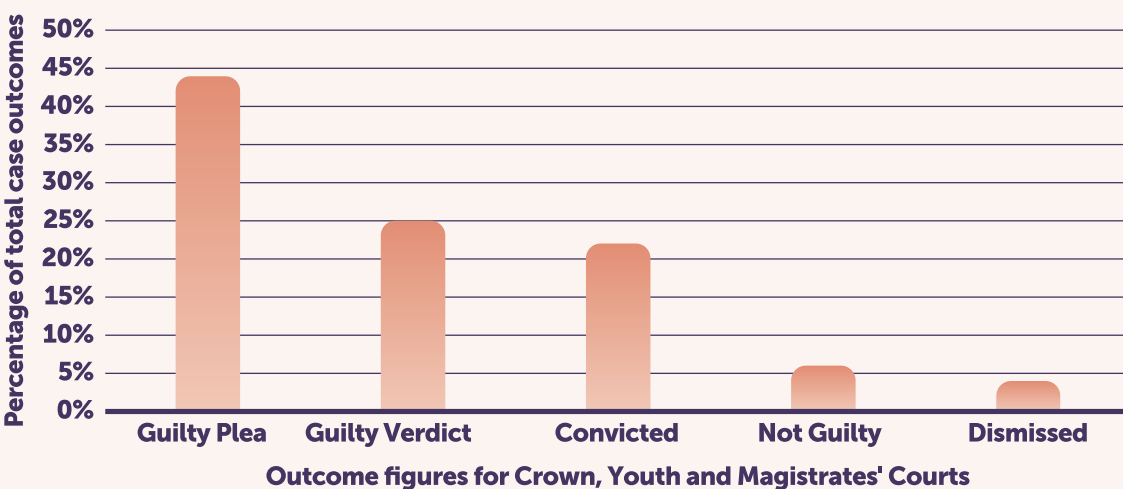
*"I was put at ease throughout."*

### REMOTE EVIDENCE CENTRES

4.2 The Victim Support NI Survey Results April 2025<sup>65</sup> found that over 95% of respondents said the REC location was good, they felt safe and at ease and that they would recommend the REC based on their positive experiences.

4.3 Figure 10 shows the case outcomes for witnesses who were scheduled to give evidence from the RECs in Belfast and Craigavon from January to June 2025. Across both RECs, 85 cases completed and there were convictions in 77, giving an overall conviction rate of 91%.

**Figure 10: Outcomes of cases in which witnesses were scheduled to give evidence from the RECs from January to June 2025.**



DoJ

65 Victim Support NI, Survey Results, April 2025 available at <https://www.victimsupportni.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/VSNI-Survey-Results-2025-V05.pdf>.

## REGISTERED INTERMEDIARIES

4.4 Since the RI scheme launched in May 2013, over 10,000 people had benefitted from the assistance of an RI. Table 3 shows the referrals from 2017-18 to 2024-25.

**Table 3: Registered Intermediaries referrals from 2017-18 to 2024-25.**

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Total Referrals</b>	705	828	947	868*	1,155	1,249	1,264	1,180

DoJ

Note

\* Impacted by the Covid pandemic

4.5 In September 2023, the DoJ commenced monitoring requests that could not be accommodated. From September 2023 to 31 March 2025, the DoJ were unable to meet 10 requests; this represented less than 0.5% of all requests received during that period. 'Unable to meet a request' meant that the DoJ were unable to provide a RI for the date and or time initially requested but they engaged with the requestor to discuss an alternative date and arranged an RI to attend the rearranged appointment.

## IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEED FOR SPECIAL MEASURES

4.6 In the most cases, either the need for special measures was not being identified at all by the PSNI and the PPS or it was being identified too far into the criminal justice process with the result that victims and witnesses were not getting the support they needed when they needed it.

4.7 When cases were prosecuted in the Crown Court the committal papers were lodged with the Court before the first hearing (arraignment). Special measures applications formed part of the committal papers. Table 4 shows the percentage of total indictable prosecutions where special measures applications were made by the PPS for automatic eligibility offences from 1 January to 31 December 2024. Sexual offence cases had the highest percentage of special measures applications (72%) with domestic abuse cases having the lowest (36%).

**Table 4: Percentage of total indictable prosecutions for automatic eligibility offences where special measures applications were made by the PPS from 1 January to 31 December 2024.**

Offence	Number of suspects prosecuted on indictment	Number of special measures applications	Percentage of indictable prosecutions where special measures application made
Sexual Offence	1327	956	72%
Human Trafficking <sup>66</sup>	14	8	57%
Stalking	10	4	40%
Domestic abuse	775	281	36%

PPS

Notes

Domestic abuse cases are cases that have been submitted to the PPS by the PSNI with a domestic abuse flag between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2024

4.8 During the PPS case file review of offences that did not carry automatic eligibility, Inspectors identified 10 out of 43 cases where there was potential vulnerability, fear or risk of intimidation and that further enquiries should have been made. Unfortunately, there was no evidence on the files that special measures had been considered.

### Timeliness of special measures applications

4.9 To reduce attrition rates, it was essential that supports for victims and witnesses were put in place as early as possible in the criminal justice process. Figure 11 sets out the average number of days between the case being listed before the Court for first hearing and the date the special measures application was first listed for hearing from 2020-2024. There was slight improvement year on year as the average number of days reduced. In 2024 it took six months on average after the case was first before the Court, for special measures applications to be lodged with the Court and listed for first hearing.

#### 66 Human Trafficking offences considered

*Holding a person in slavery or servitude.*

*Requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour.*

*Arranging or facilitating travel of another with a view to exploitation.*

*Committing an offence with intent to commit a slavery or human trafficking offence.*

*Conspiracy to traffic for exploitation.*

*Human Trafficking.*

*Committing an offence of kidnapping or false imprisonment with intent to commit a slavery or human trafficking offence.*

*Aiding and abetting holding a person in slavery or servitude.*

*Holding a person in slavery or servitude.*

*Trafficking within the UK for purposes of sexual exploitation (by another).*

*Trafficking out of the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation.*

*Trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation.*

*Trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation (facilitating another).*

*Trafficking outside of the UK for sexual exploitation.*

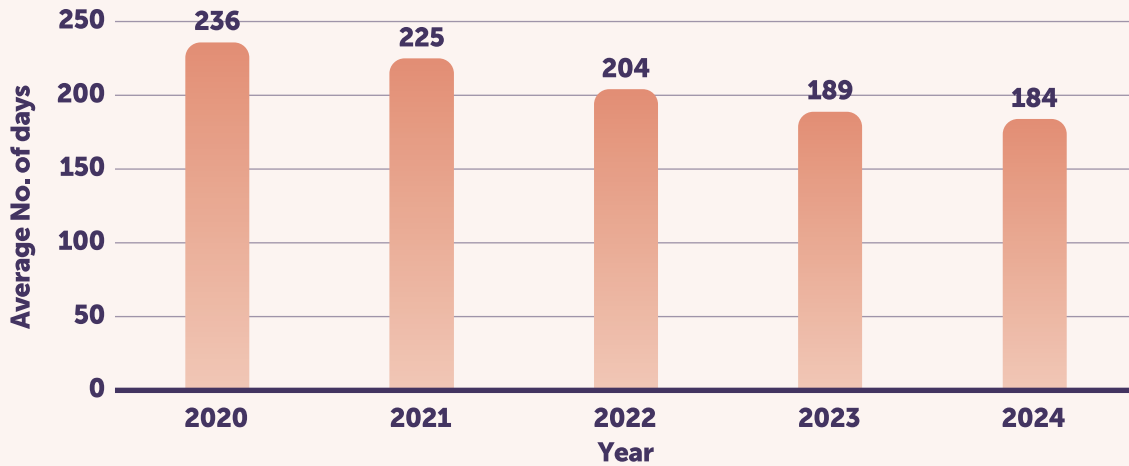
*Trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation.*

*Conspiracy to traffick within the UK for exploitation.*

*Trafficking people within UK for exploitation.*

*Trafficking of people within UK for exploitation.*

**Figure 11: The average number of days between the case being listed before the Crown, Youth and Magistrates' Courts for first hearing and the date the special measures application was first listed for hearing from 2020-2024.**



PPS

4.10 When special measures applications were lodged with the Court, PPS Prosecutors made an application to the Judge who made a determination on the application. Figure 12 shows that, in the Magistrates' Court from 2019 to 2025, the time taken between receipt of the special measures application by the Court and the disposal<sup>67</sup> of the application had fluctuated year on year, but there had been a reduction in time taken since 2023.

**Figure 12: The average number of days between special measures applications being received and the applications being dealt with by the Magistrates' Court from 2019 to 1 January-30 July 2025.**



NICTS

67 Disposal means that the application has been dealt with by being granted, refused, withdrawn or 'other'.

4.11 The average time taken in the Magistrates' Court, from receipt to disposal, varied depending on the type of special measure being applied for, as shown in Table 5. The longest time taken to determine applications was for screening witnesses from the accused (36 days), with the shortest time being taken to deal with applications to give evidence in private (6 days).

**Table 5: The average time taken in the Magistrates' Court from receipt to disposal for each type of special measure applied for from January-July 2025.**

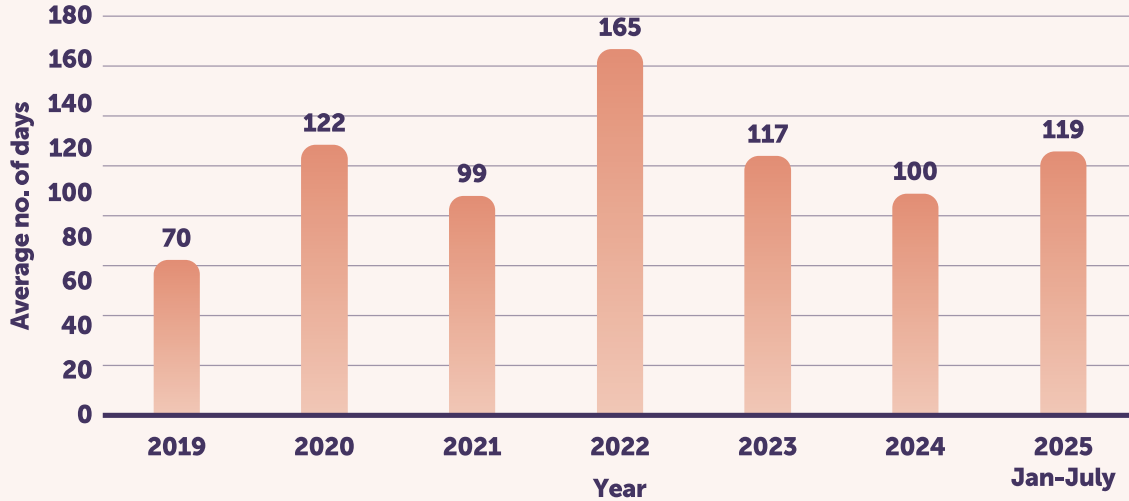
Special Measures Type	Time in days from Receipt To Disposal	
	Average time in days	Number disposed of
Screening witness from the accused	36	15
Evidence by live link	21	571
Evidence given in private	6	2
Removal of wigs and gowns	7	1
Video-recorded evidence-in-chief	19	12
Examination of witness through an Intermediary	20	41
Remote Evidence Centre	18	3
Live Link for Witness inside the UK	14	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>654</b>

NICTS

Please note numbers have been rounded up to nearest whole number.

4.12 Timeliness was considerably worse in the Crown Court as evidenced by Figure 13. Again, the figures had fluctuated over the years but in the first six months of 2025, it took on average 119 days between the special measures application being received and the application being dealt with by the Crown Court.

**Figure 13: The average number of days between special measures applications being received and the applications being dealt with by the Crown Court from 2019 to 1 January-30 July 2025.**



NICTS

4.13 As with the Magistrates' Court, the average time taken from receipt to disposal of applications in the Crown Court varied depending on the type of special measure being applied for (see Table 6). The longest time taken to determine applications was for screening witnesses from the accused (316 days), with the shortest time being taken to deal with applications to give evidence from the REC (22 days).

**Table 6: The time taken in the Crown Court from receipt of the special measures application by the Court to disposal of the application from January to July 2025.**

Special Measures Type	Time in days from Receipt To Disposal	
	Average time in days	Number disposed of
Screening witness from the accused	316	9
Evidence by live link	102	206
Removal of wigs and gowns	245	1
Video-recorded evidence-in-chief	134	95
Examination of witness through an Intermediary	94	10
Aids to communication	30	1
Remote Evidence Centre	22	1
Live Link for Witness inside the UK	231	4
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>Total 327</b>

NICTS

Please note numbers have been rounded up to nearest whole number.

**Attrition Rates**

4.14 The PSNI Accountability Report, presented to the NIPB in October 2025 included attrition rates in respect of some offences, with victims who would be considered vulnerable. The figures were based on the percentage number of crimes not proceeding to court because the victim did not support prosecution but there was no information about the reasons for the lack of support or at which point of the process support, if given, it was withdrawn. The attrition rates for 2023-24 were:

- 44.4% for domestic crimes (3.4 percentage points increase compared to 2022-23); and
- 39.1% for crimes against children (a decrease of 0.7 of a percentage point compared to 2022-23).

4.15 The attrition rates for hate crimes are set out in Table 7.

**Table 7: The percentage of hate crimes not proceeding to Court because the victim did not support this course of action for 2022-23 to 2023-24.**

Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)	2022-23	2023-24
Racist	27.5%	20.5%
Sexual Orientation	32.5%	30.7%
Sectarian	20.1%	20.8%
Faith/Religion	33.3%	14.6%
Disability	31.4%	27.6%
Transgender Identity	33.3%	43.9%

PSNI

4.16 The Charter entitlements of victims and witnesses under the Charters were not being delivered and with this, a failure to acknowledge the strong evidence base that procedural justice affected victim and witness satisfaction including the extent to which their participation and voice was facilitated during the criminal justice process. The PPS and the PSNI needed to effectively capture the vulnerabilities of victims and witnesses as early as possible so that the correct supports were put in place through their justice journey. There was also an opportunity to really grip what the legislation had intended in respect of automatically eligible offences. The effectiveness of the criminal justice system response needed to be captured and monitored to determine whether victims and witnesses were being adequately supported and to inform improvements.

## APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

### SCOPING MEETINGS

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Inspectors met with the PSNI, the NSPCC and Victim Support NI to determine the scope of the inspection.

### DESKTOP RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

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Research literature and guidance were reviewed in relation to special measures. This was used to inform the development of Terms of Reference for the inspection and fieldwork planning. A review was also completed of external and internal documentation relating to the effectiveness of the use and operation of special measures in the Criminal Courts. This was used during fieldwork, planning and analysis.

### FIELDWORK

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One-to-one interviews and focus groups were completed and Inspectors very much appreciated the time and efforts involved in organising these. The bulk of these took place with the PSNI and PPS and to a lesser degree the with the NICTS. Inspectors also met with DoJ representatives and the Judiciary and were grateful for the information provided by them. Representatives from the following areas in each agency were interviewed:

#### PPS:

- Senior Assistant Director x 2;
- Assistant Directors x 2;
- Head of Policy and Information;
- Policy Leads x 2;
- Senior Public Prosecutors x 6;
- Public Prosecutors x 4;
- WVCU Manager; and
- WVCU staff Belfast and Foyle (Derry/Londonderry) x 8.

#### PSNI:

- Chief Superintendent PPB;
- Detective Superintendent PPB;
- Inspector PPB;
- Superintendent Crime Branch;

- Chief Inspector Justice Department;
- Training Officers Crime Faculty;
- Gatekeepers;
- Detective Terrorism Investigation Unit;
- Detective Murder Investigation Team;
- Detective Protected Persons;
- Neighbourhood Policing Team and Local Policing Team Police Officers Ballymena; and
- Neighbourhood Policing Team and Local Policing Team Police Officers Dungannon.

### **NICTS:**

- Chief Executive;
- Head of Court Operations;
- Policy Lead;
- Head of Security; and
- Court Clerks x 3 (Newry, Craigavon and Dungannon).

Interviews and focus groups were also undertaken with stakeholder organisations including:

- ASSIST NI;
- Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime in Northern Ireland;
- Nexus NI;
- NSPCC YWS;
- The Bar Council of Northern Ireland;
- The Judiciary;
- The Law Society of Northern Ireland;
- Victim Support NI; and
- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland.

Inspectors conducted a file review of 43 PSNI cases. Inspectors requested a list of all files submitted to the PPS within a three-month period (1 December 2024 – 28 February 2025) and from this Inspectors selected files at random.

Inspectors also conducted a file review of 43 PPS cases, separate from the Police files reviewed. Inspectors requested a list of all Indictable and Summary Decisions issued by the PPS from June 2024 until May 2025 (excluding files with Road Traffic and Disorderly Behaviour as the primary offence) and from this Inspectors selected files at random.

Inspectors visited the Belfast REC and Foyle Family Justice Centre in Londonderry/Derry.

This Inspection was assisted by the use of Microsoft Copilot, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered tool, guided and reviewed by CJI Inspectors, in line with UK Government AI policy and CJI's interim AI policy.

## APPENDIX 2: **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **SPECIAL MEASURES IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S CRIMINAL COURTS - AN INSPECTION OF THEIR USE AND OPERATION**

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

##### **Introduction**

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) proposes to undertake an inspection of the effectiveness of the use and operation of Special Measures in the criminal Courts.

Special measures are adjustments to typical Court practices, which are made to help Court users, particularly vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, participate fully in Court proceedings and give the best possible evidence before the Court. The types of special measures available include the provision of screens at Court, the use of live link and video technology and the removal of wigs and gowns.

Special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses are authorised by the Court and only if it is determined that they are likely to improve the quality of a witness's evidence. Some groups have automatic eligibility including children, a witness who is the complainant in respect of a sexual offence and a victim of a domestic abuse offence (as detailed below). While special measures are applied for, the Judiciary usually grant applications for people in those groups. 'Quality' encompasses coherence, completeness and accuracy in the evidence. In deciding eligibility, the Courts must consider witnesses' own views about the need for special measures.

The key organisations involved in this inspection are the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). CJI do not inspect the Judiciary but as a key stakeholder, who has responsibility for determining whether special measures are granted and have experience of how they operate in criminal Courts, their views will be sought during fieldwork.

Representatives from voluntary and community sector organisations who provide support to victims and witnesses, in particular, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) Young Witness Service and Victim Support Northern Ireland, who provide support to victims and witness at Court and in Remote Evidence Centres, will also be invited to take part to inform the inspection.

## Context

Special measures provisions are primarily legislated for in The Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1999<sup>1</sup> ("the Order"). Subsequent legislation over the last 25 years commenced parts of the Order that were not yet in force and also made amendments:

- The Coroners and Justice Act 2009<sup>2</sup> and the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011<sup>3</sup> amended the Order to remove the distinction between child witnesses in need of special protection and children giving evidence, as well as changing the upper age at which children qualify for special measures from 17 to 18 years.
- The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021<sup>4</sup> amended the Order to include domestic abuse as an offence for which witnesses were eligible for assistance on grounds of fear or distress about giving evidence.

The Department of Justice (DoJ) published their first Victim and Witness Strategy which incorporated special measures in 2013, *'Making a Difference to Victims and Witnesses of Crime – Improving Access to Justice, Services and Support – A Five-Year Strategy (2013-2018)'*,<sup>5</sup> which provided the strategic direction to criminal justice organisations. This strategy delivered the Victims and Witness Charters in 2015<sup>6</sup> and 2017<sup>7</sup> respectively which advised victims and witnesses about their entitlements, including special measures, and the standards of service that they can expect to receive when in contact with the criminal justice system; the establishment of the Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU) in April 2014; and the establishment of a Registered Intermediary Service in 2013. The 2013-18 Strategy was subsequently supplemented by a revised three year action plan<sup>8</sup>, which was published in November 2018.

The current Victim and Witness Strategy 2021-2024<sup>9</sup> was extended for one year and aims to:

- understand better what victims and witnesses need;
- provide more effective support;
- focus more on ensuring that we consider the needs of victims and witnesses as we put in place new policies, strategies and operational practices; and
- ensure that we consistently provide the information, services and support that victims and witnesses need and are entitled to.

In January 2012 the DoJ published *'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings. Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, the use of special measures, and the provision of pre-trial therapy.'*<sup>10</sup> At the time of writing, this was still the primary source of guidance for the PSNI. The PPS published their Victim and Witness Policy in 2017<sup>11</sup> which reinforced the Victim Charter and provided information for victims regarding the entitlement and eligibility requirements for special measures and the types of supporting evidence required to support application for special measures.

The most recent Victim and Witness Experience of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System Survey key findings for 2022-23<sup>12</sup> did not include specific questions on special measures but did examine victim and witness awareness of the Victim and Witness Charters, the provision of information around giving evidence by live link and concerns of victims and witnesses attending Court. Findings included:

- just over one fifth of victims (21%) reported being aware of the Victim Charter; of those victims aware of the Charter, just 11% reported having referred to it; of those who referred to it, 78% reported having found it helpful;
- fewer than three in 10 witnesses (27%) reported being aware of the Witness Charter; of those witnesses aware of the Charter, 9% reported having referred to it; all of those who referred to it reported having found it helpful;
- 28% of respondents reported having heard of the VWCU;
- 24% of respondents reported having received adequate information around giving evidence remotely by sightlink; and
- the two concerns most frequently cited by respondents with regard to Court attendance related to potential contact with the defendant and/or his/her supporters (cited by 56% of respondents) and fear of intimidation from the defendant and/or his/her supporters (52%).

It was important that PSNI Investigators established at an early stage whether a witness was entitled to special measures, and if so, what measures would best assist. To ensure witnesses were aware if they had been granted adjustments, it was important that special measure applications were heard before the Court as early as possible. Protracted Court proceedings and the uncertainty around whether measures would be granted often caused further distress to victims. Tantamount to early identification of needs and the prompt hearing of the special measures application was clear, timely, communication with the witness regarding the outcome of the application. This inspection will look at the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in identifying victim and witness needs and the support provided and the communication with victims and witnesses as they traverse the criminal justice process.

### Previous inspections

CJI have previously carried out an inspection of *The use of special measures in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland in 2012*.<sup>13</sup> Since then special measures have been inspected as part of other inspection reports including *A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Sexual Violence and Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2018*<sup>14</sup>, *A Thematic inspection of the handling of domestic violence and abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*.<sup>15</sup> and *An Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Criminal Court Administration 2024*.<sup>16</sup>

## Aims of the Inspection

The broad aims of this inspection are to:

- examine the strategic and policy framework for special measures and the strategic accountability mechanisms in place for their use and evaluation;
- review the effectiveness of special measures governance including recording, quality assurance and performance management;
- examine the effectiveness of the needs assessment and processes utilised by the PSNI and the PPS in early identification of witness needs, vulnerabilities and intimidation;
- review the operational delivery of special measures by criminal justice organisations in achieving outcomes for victims and witnesses and supporting the achievement of strategic business objectives and improved service delivery;
- assess how effectively criminal justice organisations deliver the relevant Victim and Witness Charters obligations;
- examine the effectiveness of awareness raising of victims and witnesses entitlements under the relevant provisions of the Victim and Witness Charters;
- assess whether the intended outcomes of special measures have been achieved;
- assess how the effectiveness of special measures use is benchmarked against international standards and good practice elsewhere; and
- any other matters arising during the inspection if considered appropriate by CJI may be included.

## Methodology

The review will be based on the CJI Inspection Framework, the three main elements of the inspection framework are:

- Strategy and governance;
- Delivery; and
- Outcomes.

## Design and Planning

### *Preliminary research*

Data and initial information has been researched online to inform the scope of this inspection.

### *Stakeholder consultation*

Consultation has taken place with the PSNI, the NSPCC and Victim Support NI to determine the scope of the inspection.

### *Benchmarking, research and data collection*

Collection of benchmarking information and data and review of inspection and research reports will be undertaken.

### **Contact with organisations**

Terms of reference will be shared with the DoJ, the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS and other bodies as appropriate. Liaison officers from the relevant organisations should be nominated for the purposes of the inspection.

Policies and procedures, management information, minutes of meetings and related documentation from the organisations will be requested and examined.

### **Stakeholder consultation**

The following stakeholder organisations and individuals will be consulted:

- NSPCC;
- Victim Support NI;
- Nexus;
- ASSIST NI;
- Commissioner for Victims of Crime in Northern Ireland designate;
- The Judiciary;
- The Law Society of Northern Ireland; and
- The Bar Council of Northern Ireland.

Other stakeholders and organisations may be consulted as required.

### **Self-assessment**

The PSNI, the PPS and the NICTS will be asked to undertake a self-assessment, which will be reviewed by CJI during this inspection.

### **Development of fieldwork plan**

Interviews and focus groups will be conducted with the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS, the DoJ and other criminal justice agency staff, and relevant stakeholders to give an insight into the issues affecting the effectiveness of the delivery of special measures to support victims and witnesses in giving their best evidence. Inspectors will also examine PSNI and PPS documents and records to assess the effectiveness of processes for early identification of vulnerabilities and timely special measures applications.

### **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 emerging findings to the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS and the DoJ.

### **Drafting of report**

Following completion of the fieldwork and analysis of data, a draft report will be shared with the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS and the DoJ and any other relevant stakeholders for factual accuracy check within four weeks. The Chief Inspector will invite the organisations, where appropriate, to complete an action plan within a further two weeks to address the recommendations and if the plan has been agreed and is available, it will

be published at the same time/alongside the final inspection report. The report will be shared, under embargo, in advance of the publication date with relevant bodies.

**Publication and Closure**

A report will be sent to the Minister of Justice for permission to publish. When permission is received the report will be finalised for publication. A press release will be drafted and shared with the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS and the DoJ and any other relevant stakeholders prior to publication and release. A publication date will be agreed and the report will be issued.

<b>Indicative Timetable</b>	
<b>Scoping, research and self-assessment:</b>	December 24-January 2025.
<b>Fieldwork:</b>	March-June 2025 (Inspectors are engaged in prearranged work on other inspections during April and May 2025. Inspection fieldwork will take place during March and June 2025).
<b>Draft report to the PSNI, PPS, NICTS and DoJ and other appropriate organisations for factual accuracy:</b>	November 2025.
<b>Publication (subject to permission to publish):</b>	January 2026.

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

## ENDNOTES

- 1 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Criminal Evidence \(NI\) Order 1999 available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1999/2789/contents](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1999/2789/contents)
- 2 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Corners and Justice Act 2009 available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/contents](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/contents)
- 3 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Justice Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011 available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/24/contents](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/24/contents)
- 4 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/enacted](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/enacted)
- 5 DoJ, Making a Difference to Victims and Witnesses of Crime – Improving Access to Justice, Services and Support – A Five-Year Strategy (2013 -2018) available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/making-a-difference-to-victims-and-witnesses-of-crime-strategy.pdf>
- 6 DoJ, Victim Charter 2015 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Victim%20Charter.pdf>
- 7 DoJ, Witness Charter 2017 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/witness-charter.PDF>
- 8 DoJ, Victim and Witness Action Plan 2017-2020 available at [Victim and Witness https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim-and-witness%20-action-plan-2017-2020.pdf](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim-and-witness%20-action-plan-2017-2020.pdf) Action Plan 2017/2020.
- 9 DoJ, Victim and Witness Strategy 2021-2024 available at [https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim%20and%20witness%20strategy%202021-2024\\_0.pdf](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/victim%20and%20witness%20strategy%202021-2024_0.pdf)
- 10 DoJ, Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings 2012 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/achieving-best-evidence-a-practitioner-guide.pdf>
- 11 PPS, Victim and Witness Policy 2017 available at <https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/files/ppsni/publications/PPS%20Victim%20and%20Witness%20Policy%20%28June%202017%29.pdf>
- 12 DoJ, Victim and Witness Experience of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System: Key Findings – 2022/23 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/victim-and-witness-experience-northern-ireland-criminal-justice-system-key-findings-202223>
- 13 CJI, The use of special measures in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland 2012 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2012/April---June/The-use-of-special-measures-in-the-criminal-justice>
- 14 CJI, A Thematic Inspection of the Handling of Sexual Violence and Abuse Cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2018 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2018/October-December/Sexual-Violence>
- 15 CJI, A Thematic inspection of the handling of domestic violence and abuse cases by the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland. available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2019/April-June/Domestic-Violence>
- 16 CJI, An Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Criminal Court Administration 2024 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2024/July-Sep/Effectiveness-of-criminal-Court-administration>



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