Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all



KEY FACTS

AN INSPECTION OF

ADULT SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

NOVEMBER 2026

WHAT WAS THIS INSPECTION ABOUT?

- Adult safeguarding is about preventing harm from abuse, exploitation and neglect, and protecting anyone aged 18 or older when harm has occurred or is suspected. It is everyone's responsibility.
- Inspectors examined how criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland identified, reported and responded to adult safeguarding concerns.
- Inspectors looked at the arrangements in place to protect adults at risk of harm.
- We assessed how justice and health organisations worked together and how adults who experienced abuse were supported to access justice.
- Inspectors examined the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Youth Justice Agency (YJA). Inspectors also considered the role of the Department of Justice (DoJ) in adult safeguarding and the Adult Protection Bill, which was under consideration and scrutiny at the time of this inspection.



HOW DID WE CARRY OUT THE INSPECTION?

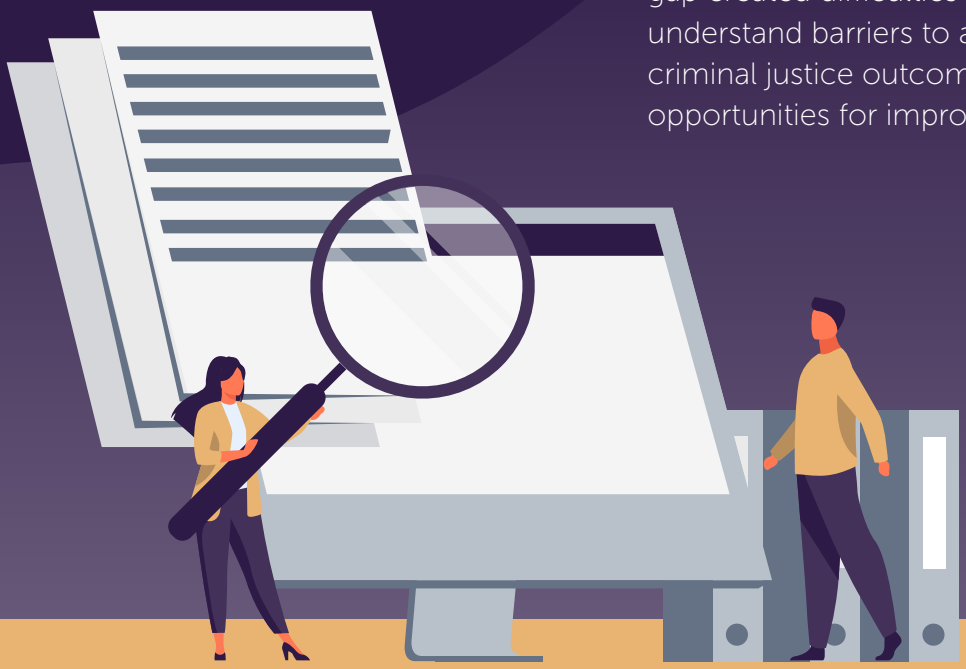
Inspectors reviewed legislation in place in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, policy documents, previous CJI Inspection reports and Reviews. We also looked at research data and management information provided by criminal justice organisations.

We met with senior leaders, Police Officers, Probation Officers, Public Prosecutors, Prison Officers and YJA staff and spoke with a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations and oversight bodies involved in supporting adults at risk of harm and adults in need of protection.

Inspectors reviewed 38 safeguarding referrals to understand how safeguarding arrangements operated in practice.

WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- There was a clear commitment among the criminal justice organisations we inspected to protecting adults at risk of harm.
- We found examples of dedicated staff, good partnership working and safeguarding referrals that resulted in proactive support being put in place.
- Adult safeguarding arrangements were operating during a period of uncertainty with organisations waiting for the Adult Protection Bill to become law and place adult safeguarding on a statutory footing. In the interim the *Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership* regional safeguarding policy and procedures had become dated.
- This period of change and uncertainty had contributed to inconsistencies in operational practice around understanding adult safeguarding thresholds, responsibilities and referral pathways.
- Inspectors identified a longstanding safeguarding gap within prisons, with NIPS staff unable to refer adult protection concerns arising within prison directly to Health and Social Care Trust Adult Gateway Teams. This meant adult protection concerns in prison settings were not assessed in line with regional safeguarding arrangements.
- While specialist staff demonstrated strong knowledge and practice, wider understanding of adult safeguarding varied between organisations and it was not always understood as a distinct concept by operational staff across criminal justice organisations. Training, quality assurance and governance arrangements were inconsistent.
- There was limited data available with crime outcomes, prosecution decisions and Court outcomes for adult safeguarding cases not being routinely monitored. This information gap created difficulties to better understand barriers to achieving a criminal justice outcome or to identify opportunities for improvement.





WHAT NEEDS TO BE BETTER?

Inspectors have made six recommendations for improvement including:

At a Strategic (leadership) level:

- The DoJ and Department of Health (DoH) should agree a plan to review and update the regional adult safeguarding policy and procedures.
- The DoH and NIPS, should urgently resolve the safeguarding referral gap affecting people in prison.
- Criminal justice organisations should review how adult safeguarding policy, procedures and Adult Safeguarding Champion arrangements apply to their work and ensure staff have clear guidance on recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns.
- Research should be undertaken to improve understanding of access to justice for adults in need of protection who are victims of crime.

At an Operational (on-the-ground) level:

- Criminal justice organisations should strengthen governance arrangements, monitoring, training and quality assurance of adult safeguarding activity.
- The PSNI should quality assure adult safeguarding decisions made through its Central Referral Unit and develop learning with Health and Social Care Trust partners.

WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN NOW?

The DoJ, DoH and criminal justice organisations should work together to strengthen adult safeguarding arrangements.

We want to see action to resolve the current adult safeguarding gap in our prisons prioritised, with stronger governance and oversight arrangements in place. Clearer policy and guidance should be provided, so staff have the knowledge and support needed, to recognise and effectively respond to concerns about adults at risk.

Adult safeguarding must be recognised as a core element of public protection and access to justice, so that all adults at risk of harm are identified early, protected effectively and supported in a way that respects their rights, dignity and individual circumstances.



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