

## Department of Justice Northern Ireland



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Mánnystrie o tha Laa

### Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

### Annual Progress Report

#### Contact details:

- Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Name: Mrs Laura Wilson

Telephone: n/a

Email: [DOJESSS@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:DOJESSS@justice-ni.gov.uk)

Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan

As above

Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/department-justice-equality-scheme-2015>

**Signature: Permanent Secretary Signature to be inserted in the box below.**

**This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.**

**It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.**

**This report reflects progress made between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025**

## **PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme**

### **Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice**

- 1 In 2024-25, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

*Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.*

During 2024/25, the DoJ's governance arrangements included a continued focus on ensuring delivery of its equality and good relations duties, and diversity and inclusion priorities. That includes support at a senior level within the Department and a focus on ensuring that equality of opportunity and good relations is mainstreamed and central to policy development and service delivery. A number of Equality Impact Assessment screenings took place during the reporting period for new policies and initiatives to assess the impact on all S75 groups; where necessary mitigations were put in place. Senior staff within the Department also play an important role in review and approving equality screening documents.

Training for staff has continued to be a priority and all staff within the Department have access to a range of courses through LnKS, the centralised NICS system for learning & development, as well as on-line webinars. Where necessary, this has been complemented by specific training within business areas.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Survey (carried out biannually) is a survey of employees' attitudes to and experiences of working in the NICS. In the most recent survey, carried out in 2025, staff were asked questions on a range of topics and a high percentage continued to agree with positive "Inclusion and Fair Treatment" statements in the survey.

For example, when asked: "*I think that my department respects individual differences (e.g., culture, working styles, backgrounds, ideas, etc.)*," 71% of DoJ staff responded positively. This showed an increase of 7 percentage points from the 2023 survey. Furthermore, when asked: "*My department is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace*," 69% of DoJ staff responded positively. This showed an increase of 6 percentage points from the 2023 survey.

There has been a continued effort to seek to promote a more consistent approach to mainstreaming equality and share learning through a Justice Equality Network Group (JEN), which includes representatives from the DoJ core, its Agencies and NDPBs. A

representative of the Public Prosecution Service also attends the meetings given their interest from a system-wide perspective.

Colleagues from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) have participated in these meetings and their engagement has been welcome and helpful. The JEN is a useful forum for sharing information and learning, but a continuing challenge is seeking to ensure better equality information on the individuals who interact with the criminal justice system. Operational independence is critical to most of the organisations within the criminal justice system, therefore it is a challenge to help enhance the quality of equality information and not compromise that independence.

The Department's Equality Officer and Deputy Equality Officer provide an important source of advice to colleagues across the Department and represent the DoJ as part of the NICS Equality Practitioners Group (EPG). The Equality Officer is also the Department's representative on a Statutory Forum between the NICS and ECNI to discuss and develop guidance and forms; and to support promotion of equality across Departments. Participation allows for group discussion on issues informed by advice from the ECNI.

The DoJ is also a member of four NICS Working Groups working alongside other NICS Departments and independent Co-Design Groups to develop a series of Social Inclusion Strategies in line with a commitment in New Decade, New Approach. The four strategies under development are an Anti-Poverty Strategy, Disability Strategy, Gender Strategy and a LGBTQI+ Strategy with the Department for Communities in the lead.

The DoJ Diversity Champion attends quarterly meetings of the internal NICS Diversity Champions' Network (DCN) reporting back, as appropriate, which assists in the promotion and encouraging equality of opportunity across the NICS including the DoJ. The DCN has four thematic leads for LGBT, Gender, Disability and Ethnic Minorities.

The Department's Racial Equality Champion has continued to engage with the Racial Equality Unit in The Executive Office and participated in meetings with the Racial Equality Subgroup. The Department's Children's Champion acts as the senior point of contact for any issues relating to the impact of the Department's functions on children and young people. During this reporting period, the DoJ had a presence at the Pride Village for Belfast Pride and also Belfast MELA event at Botanic Gardens. At both events, the Department also involved other justice agencies (including Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Office of the Police Ombudsman etc) by way of promoting a joined-up approach as a justice presence.

The NICS has a number of staff networks (Disability etc) and these are promoted to staff across the Department to encourage involvement.

The DoJ maintains an Intranet which is available to all staff across the core Department and agencies. During this reporting period, a number of articles have been published on the Intranet to promote personal stories on a range of equality issues.

Further detail is provided below on initiatives within business across the Department.

### **Youth Justice Policy Division**

The Youth Justice Policy Unit within Reducing Offending Division (ROD) is focused on the development of policy and legislation for children and young people aged 10-17 who are in contact with the youth justice system. All work is taken forward with consideration of Section 75 groups, in particular Age and Gender, given the specific age group this work encompasses and the fact that males make up by far the most significant proportion of children in the justice system. The Justice Bill, introduced to the Assembly in September 2024, contains new provisions aimed at reducing the number of children held on remand in Northern Ireland, and introduces a new youth custodial sentencing framework. Both are intended to improve compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to make custody a last resort, and to reinforce the principles that all under 18s are children, should be subject to child specific sentencing arrangements, and, where custody is necessary, held under a regime which is suitable for their age.

### **The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE NI)**

PACE NI and its associated Codes of Practice (the Codes) are vital parts of the framework of legislation providing the police with the powers they need to tackle and investigate crime. The Codes provide important guidance on the use of the powers conferred on the police and other law enforcement agencies. The Codes also provide safeguards on the rights of individuals under investigation and/or detained in police custody. This includes specific provisions to meet the needs of Section 75 categories e.g. young people, females, religious needs, vulnerable adults, foreign nationals and those who do not speak English.

A review of the Codes has been carried out to revise Codes A to H and to introduce New Code I. An equality impact assessment, rural needs impact assessment and a data protection impact assessment was completed and a public consultation was carried out to seek views on the revision of the Codes. The Codes are currently under review by the Justice Committee within the NI Assembly.

### **Northern Ireland Prison Service**

The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) has continued to support initiatives during

this reporting period by participating in strategies, activities, training and awareness and by providing many other opportunities for staff and prisoners.

Following on from NIPS' attendance at the "Be the Change" Leadership Programme and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Conference, a significant volume of awareness and trauma sensitive approaches to practice and training have been delivered in partnership with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to seek to become a trauma informed organisation through culture, policy and practice. A number of NIPS staff have also completed an Early Intervention Transformation Programme in a Trauma Informed Practice 'train the trainer' programme to sustain the delivery of the training programmes across the prison service workforce.

NIPS staff and prisoners have also been involved in raising awareness of, and fundraising for, a number of organisations e.g. Autism NI. The intention of these events is to educate and inspire the people who work in NIPS, as well as the men and women in their care, to better appreciate diversity in others and support people to change ultimately helping to reduce re-offending and make NI a safer place for all of us to live.

NIPS continues to provide training and information to aid both staff and prisoners' understanding of religious beliefs and festivals throughout the year in conjunction with the Prison Chaplaincy. Information sheets are distributed in advance of religious festivals such as Ramadan and special arrangements are in place for providing food and permitting prayer time to prisoners. The appropriate food is provided throughout the year to prisoners whose religion requires a special diet such as Halal and Kosher foods. All prisoners are provided with access to religious literature, a Chaplain and worship of their particular denomination.

During the reporting period, the Prison Service College delivered initial Induction Training to 52 new recruits. This training included Autism Awareness, Equality & Diversity, Dignity at Work, Human Rights, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, Just a Minute, Disability Awareness, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, SafeTalk, Mental Health, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), Females in Custody and Supporting People At Risk Evolution (SPAR Evo). Foundation in Forensic Care training has been delivered to 17 staff across NIPS, with all achieving the associated accreditation.

All prisoners complete an initial assessment with the Healthcare in Prison Team on arrival and a fuller assessment within 72 hours. Where disability concerns are identified, a referral is made to both Healthcare and Psychology and adjustments made to support that individual. Advice is routinely sought from the ECNI, British Deaf Association (BDA) and other external bodies as necessary.

Following engagement with the BDA and NI Institute for the Blind, NIPS has made further improvements to support deaf and blind prisoners. A number of hearing and visually impaired prisoners were detained during the reporting period. As a result of

the reasonable adjustments made, there were no issues raised by the prisoners or the staff caring for them.

Reasonable adjustments included the use of staff with interpretation skills and the purchase of watches and pillows that vibrate in the event of an alarm sounding. Modified Zoom meetings where the prisoner can write and display what they want to communicate are also used. Braille Units in the prisons produced 10 full-scale braille novels, along with a large number of menus and information sheets for external organisations.

NIPS also works with partner organisations such as Start 360 who support people in custody who want to reduce their substance misuse. Therapeutic Gardens are used to provide purposeful and therapeutic activity to support and challenge those in custody with low mobility and/or additional needs towards rehabilitation and integration into the community on release. NIPS operates a buddy system whereby older and disabled prisoners are partnered with a fellow prisoner who can assist with their daily routine.

NIPS has introduced animals and therapeutic dogs across its establishments as part of an animal husbandry therapy initiative for prisoners. The therapeutic value of looking after and caring for animals is widely recognised. Along with the 'Taking the lead' programme, these initiatives encourage and promote personal growth, development and provide individuals with a chance to gain a range of skills relevant to life in the community and workplace.

NIPS has hosted and supported a number of initiatives to help both staff and prisoners with physical and mental health wellbeing. A high number of prisoners have mental health problems and addictions to alcohol, drugs and gambling. These gardens provide a green space where they can associate with other individuals and engage with third party agencies.

A number of the actions within the joint health and justice "*Improving Health within Criminal Justice*" Action Plan have been implemented, and work is ongoing in relation to the development of the first progress report against the Action Plan. The Executive agreed to re-establish the Executive Working Group on Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention and an update on DoJ activity relevant to improved mental wellbeing and resilience was recently submitted. A delivery plan under the joint NIPS/South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) Suicide and Self Harm Risk Management Strategy is supporting the implementation of the Strategy. In addition, a delivery plan under the joint NIPS/SEHSCT *Reducing the Harm Caused by Substance Use* is supporting its delivery across NIPS.

Five years on from the introduction of a new approach to supporting people at risk of self-harm and suicide (SPAR Evolution) an external Review was undertaken as recommended in the RQIA Review of Services for Vulnerable Persons Detained in NI Prisons. The final report was published in May 2024 and contained 11

recommendations. SPAR Evolution joint procedures have been revised in light of the recommendations in the report and from scrutiny bodies. Postvention support guides for staff and prisoners have been developed and implemented as support tools following a death in custody. A specific guide for families is currently under development.

A Service Level Agreement between NIPS and Belfast Metropolitan College (on behalf of the college partnership with North West Regional College) is in operation which adopts a new approach to the provision of learning, skills and employability training to people in custody. A wide and diverse curriculum ensures that the individual characteristics and needs of individuals are met, including the unique needs of women, older people and foreign nationals. Provision also ensures that the Special Educational Needs of individuals are identified and relevant support put in place.

Engagement continues with the embedded Home Office Immigration Officers who provide advice and support to foreign national prisoners around immigration and deportation matters. Interpreters and translators are used as necessary to enable NIPS to engage with Foreign National prisoners and vice versa. Electronic tablet devices have also been introduced and supplied to prisoners with little or no command of English to enable them to use Google Translate for every-day communication.

Monthly Equality & Diversity monitoring meetings have continued with representatives from across the prison estate and representatives from Chaplaincy, Probation Board, the Independent Monitoring Board, ECNI and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). Prisoner Forums meet in advance of those meetings to raise any issues from prisoners. As far as possible, NIPS seeks to ensure they are as representative as possible of older, younger, disabled, traveller, foreign national, male and female prisoners.

Statistical reports are reviewed and examined for any disparities in decision making relating to discipline, drug testing, searches, complaints, adjudications etc. broken down by S75 group. Prison Governors are asked to investigate and explain any apparent disparities.

Virtual visits continue and have been very well received by all prisoners, and in particular foreign nationals and their families, for whom considerable travel costs can arise. NIPS has also facilitated Consular visits during the reporting period.

Maghaberry Visits offer "Assisted Visits" to families that may require additional support during their in-person Visit. Assisted Visits are arranged by the Family Officer who liaises with the prisoner and his family to identify how the family can be assisted due to a special need such as a child with a disability.

NIPS has implemented a number of electronic tablet devices across the prison establishments for the purpose of casual translation with non-English speaking prisoners. This function is an additional aid for everyday casual exchanges with non-English speaking individuals and not a replacement for the ongoing arrangements for professional translation services.

To support the welfare of the significant Foreign National demographic within the prison population, NIPS Maghaberry has collaborated with the SEHSCT to establish a monthly Foreign National Well-Being Hub. The Hub is facilitated by a range of prison departments and NIPS partners including the Mental Health Team, Prisoner Development Unit, Learning & Skills and Prisoner Support and Safety Team, all of whom are consistent monthly contributors. This clinic style approach provides an additional platform for Foreign National prisoners to raise any concerns they may have and the professionals in identifying any clinical or other needs through the use of professional interpreters, also in situ.

HMP Magilligan is working towards the Autism Impact Award, with six staff having been Makaton trained, and Autism information sessions to be provided. An action plan has been created to ensure staff are trained to understand autism and are able to provide support for autistic people, if required.

A team of staff from the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) who engage with NIPS to deliver services adopt a person-centred, trauma-informed approach, recognising the profound impact family imprisonment has on loved ones. This ensures that everyone who attends a visit feels welcomed, safe, and heard. The Visitor Centre team is mindful of the diverse circumstances and needs visitors face, with particular attention given to families of foreign nationals or people from BME backgrounds who often face additional barriers, including language challenges, cultural stigma, fear, social isolation, and an unfamiliar justice system, including by having signs in different languages and supporting when ordering refreshments. Translation devices are also available.

The NIACRO team is especially mindful of the importance of providing additional support for visitors with specific needs, including both children and adults. For example, meeting needs of people with disabilities on the bus and walking to visits.

NIACRO Team members ensure there is a variety of toys in the internal Visit Halls and in the Welcome Centres to meet the needs of neurodivergent children visitors. The team have been trained in play techniques with children who are neurodiverse.

In the knowledge that up to 80% of disabilities are not visible, NIACRO staff are undertaking JAM (Just a Minute) training through the NOW group. There is a commitment to achieving JAM status in each Visitor Centre with signage displayed for visitors to promote this. Work will also continue to ensure the Welcome Centre is

compliant with meeting needs, ensuring sufficient space to move between tables and chairs.

All NIACRO Visitor team members undertake Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training. They also have ongoing training in anti-racism and cultural competency, disability awareness, sexual orientation, and gender identity awareness, neurodivergence and autism, mental health and supporting trauma-informed assessments.

### **Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime**

The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) is a cross-departmental initiative aimed at reducing the harm caused by paramilitary activity and organised crime in Northern Ireland but is hosted by the DoJ. It adopts a trauma-informed, public health approach to violence reduction, with a strong emphasis on early intervention and multi-agency collaboration. Several projects under EPPOC contribute to equality and disability outcomes, particularly through targeted support for vulnerable individuals and communities. Examples are; projects that provide trauma-informed youth work interventions for young people affected by paramilitary violence or at risk of criminal exploitation focussing on building resilience, promoting protective factors, and supporting transitions away from coercive environments; a programme that empowers women through training and support to take on leadership roles in community development. It aims to build capacity within communities affected by paramilitarism and promote lawfulness and active citizenship. Evaluations have shown its effectiveness in supporting women into transformative roles, contributing to long-term resilience and inclusion.

Other policy interventions have included supporting the promotion of lawfulness in schools and through youth work in communities and supporting development of a cross departmental programme to prevent vulnerable young people being drawn into paramilitary activity. The Programme has also supported delivery of a programme to support at risk young men and delivery of a programme for women in community development. Work has also been advanced to raise awareness about vulnerable young people and the impact of paramilitary style attacks as well as supporting positive impacts for families of ex-prisoners through measure to address employment, access to financial services and adoption for ex-prisoners.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2024-25 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

A review of the Department's Equality Scheme has been completed and has been shared with ECNI for review/comment. An Audit of Inequalities (Aol) has been recently completed on Departmental functions and activities to inform an updated Equality Action Plan (EAP) for the next five year period which is currently in draft form. A 5 year Departmental DAP has also been drafted.

In the meantime, work has continued to deliver equality outcomes across the Department's business area.

### **Youth Justice Agency**

During 2022/23, the Youth Justice Agency developed its Equality Action Plan for the period 2022 to 2025 that set out how the Agency intended to meet its equality obligations.

This YJA equality action plan focused on four key areas:

- Strategy / policy;
- Operational practice;
- Data collection; and
- Leadership and governance.

The Agency aims to integrate Section 75 duties throughout all its functions whereby any new initiatives, proposals, schemes or programmes are considered within the context of these duties. This complements the outcomes-based accountability approach used within the Agency and captured within its annual Performance Impact Report which are available online.

The core Department sets the overall policy and legislative framework within which the YJA works. A significant focus for Justice Ministers has been on reducing the numbers of young people who enter the formal criminal justice system, reducing levels of re-offending and ensuring custody is used, as far as possible, as a last resort. As there are more males and more children from a catholic community background, action to reduce the numbers of young people in the formal criminal justice system will have a particularly positive impact on children in these equality categories.

The Agency's Corporate Plan 2022-25 was developed in the context of the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice, published by the Justice Minister in March 2022. The Agency's priorities were also informed by young people. The Agency has invested in increasing the participation of young people in the development of its services. This work is led by a dedicated Participation Officer, participation champions across the organisation and the recruitment of Experts by Experience.

The Agency uses Section 75 data when introducing a new policy, strategy or spending proposal in comparing the Section 75 characteristics to those of the general population

(via the census). In addition, Section 75 data is used as evidence when proposing a change in law or policy, for example, date of birth has been used to calculate age when looking at the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Section 75 data is published annually in the YJA's official statistics bulletin and available on the DoJ website.

The Juvenile Justice Centre also produces reports providing statistics on some Section 75 characteristics. Data is collected in relation to physical restraint, single separation and sanctions with a focus on the areas of gender, age, religion and ethnic background. This is then analysed and discussed at the JJC Use of Force governance meetings, senior management and individual team meetings.

In 2020-21 the Agency commissioned Queen's University Belfast to undertake quantitative and qualitative research to better understand if/why there is any overrepresentation of particular groups of children within the youth justice system. The final draft report was received in March 2022. The research found that there are large gaps in the Section 75 equality data collected by Justice Agencies. To address these deficiencies the YJA has developed its data collection particularly around youth engagement clinics, earlier stage diversion and looked after children.

In terms of staff training, the Agency has sought advice from the ECNI on current best practice on the management of transgender and intersex children and has used this to develop appropriate guidance and training.

In relation to Youth Justice Services, an unmet need from Trust Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for children who have offended in the community was identified. 61% of children assessed by community-based teams in Youth Justice Services were identified as needing CAMHS support. Yet, that was either not available or available only in a way that did not meet their needs. To help address that need, YJA is co-funding dedicated CAMHS workers across four of our area teams, jointly funded with Trusts. This service has now been rolled out to all our five area teams. This supplements the work of the CAMHS team YJA already funds in the Woodlands JJC. This work should benefit children across section 75 categories, but particularly children with disabilities.

### **Reduced Offending Directorate, NIPS**

The Youth Justice Policy Unit within Reducing Offending Division (ROD) is focused on the development of policy and legislation for children and young people aged 10-17 who are in contact with the youth justice system. All work is taken forward with consideration of Section 75 groups, in particular Age and Gender, given the specific age group this work encompasses and the fact that males make up by far the most significant proportion of children in the justice system. The Justice Bill, introduced to the Assembly in September 2024, contains new provisions aimed at reducing the number of children held on remand in Northern Ireland, and introduces a new youth custodial sentencing framework. Both are intended to improve compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

to make custody a last resort, and to reinforce the principles that all under 18s are children, should be subject to child specific sentencing arrangements, and, where custody is necessary, held under a regime which is suitable for their age.

### **Violence Against the Person**

The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy (2024-2031), published jointly by the Justice and Health Ministers on 25 September 2024, is to ensure that domestic and sexual abuse is not tolerated in Northern Ireland, and that everyone can be safe and free from fear regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, any form of disability. The strategy is built around five pillars: Partnership; Prevention; Children and Young People; Support and Provision; and Justice. It was developed in collaboration with the Department for Communities, the Department of Education and the Executive Office, stakeholders in the voluntary and community sector and informed by those with lived experience to address the needs of all victims and to hold perpetrators to account.

The DOJ funds ASSIST NI, a criminal justice focused advocacy service for high-risk victims, both adults and children, of domestic and sexual abuse who are engaging with the criminal justice system, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference process, and the Rowan Sexual Assessment Referral Centre. The ASSIST NI service is delivered through a partnership between Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid, Foyle Women's Aid and the Men's Advisory Project. The service is tailored to each individual victim and provides short term engagement to full advocacy, helping them navigate their way through the criminal justice system. The new advocacy support service in Northern Ireland now provides an extra service specifically dedicated to children and young people. The revised adult service launched in February 2025 and the children's service in July 2025.

### **Gillen Review**

Good progress has continued with implementation of the Gillen Review recommendations with almost 80% of the recommendations now implemented to some degree. 68% are fully completed and 10% part completed – meaning that provision is in place to deliver meaningful improvements in terms of outcomes for victims e.g. through piloting a service, but further work is required to establish mainstream services.

However, it would be misleading to measure progress simply in terms of the proportion of recommendations that have been implemented. Not all recommendations will have the same impact; therefore the Department's focus has been on progressing those recommendations that will have the most beneficial impact on victims, and these include:

- The Adult Sexual Offences Legal Adviser (SOLA) scheme launched on 1 April 2021 and is providing publicly funded legal advice to adult complainants in serious sexual offence cases. The scheme has recently been extended to March 2027. The Adult SOLA scheme which has now received over 2,500 referrals and feedback continues to be overwhelmingly positive with many service users telling us that it has increased

their confidence in the justice system, improved their understanding of how the system works and importantly, encouraged them to remain engaged within the justice system to the conclusion of their case.

- The Child SOLA (CSOLA) scheme launched on 5 February of this year. While only in place for a matter of months, the CSOLA service has already received over 300 referrals, with the mother of one child telling us she learnt more from speaking to a CSOLA for 30 minutes than she did in the past year going through the process. Sir John Gillen referred to the introduction of the SOLA scheme as a ‘game changer’ in respect of the experience of victims of serious sexual crimes.
- The Department is progressing legislation to enable SOLAs to provide in-court representation in pre-trial hearings of applications by defence to introduce evidence of the complainant’s previous sexual history at trial and for disclosure of the complainant’s personal information held by third parties. The provisions are planned to be introduced to the Assembly under the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill in Spring 2026.
- A judge-led voluntary protocol to expedite serious sexual offence cases involving child witnesses under 13 years of age is in operation in Belfast and Antrim Crown Courts and is delivering positive results. In 2024, participating organisations agreed to expedite, where possible, serious sexual offence cases involving under 16 years in all jurisdictions, but these cases are not subject to the same timeframes as in the U13 protocol. The Department is considering how to support the further rollout of the Protocol but there are some complex issues to be overcome and any expansion will require additional resources and funding.
- Remote Evidence Centres (RECs) provide a safe, comfortable space away from the court building for vulnerable witnesses to give evidence directly to the court from a video link room within the REC. Attending the REC also ensures that the witness will not encounter the defendant or the defendant’s family / supporters in or around the court building on the day of the trial. Two new RECs have been established in Belfast and Craigavon, in addition to the existing NSPCC-led facility in Derry ~ Londonderry. The Department and partners have worked hard to raise awareness and promote RECs resulting in:
  - An increase of over 600% REC trial bookings in 2024 compared to 2023.
  - This trend continued so far in 2025 with a further 90% increase in bookings.
  - In 2024, 344 witnesses (199 adults and 145 children) attended a REC to give evidence.

Sir John Gillen believed RECs would enable victims to give their best evidence and increase their confidence in the justice system. This is supported by conviction rates of 91% for cases heard using the Belfast & Craigavon RECs for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

- Over half of convictions are by guilty plea, meaning the victim does not have to provide any oral evidence at the trial.  
Later this year, a full evaluation of the existing RECs will be produced along with recommendations for further roll-out of remote evidence facilities across the country.
- The Barnahus model is a concept that offers a child-friendly approach to sexual crime where law enforcement, criminal justice, child protective services, and medical and mental health workers cooperate in a ‘joined up’ approach to ensure the best support for child victims. A cross-departmental Barnahus Working Group jointly led by the Department for Health (DoH) and DOJ is leading work to identify potential models and costed options for Barnahus model for NI. It is hoped to present the outcome of these considerations, including a preferred option, to Ministers in autumn 2025.
- At a societal level, the DOJ worked with the PSNI and Executive Office to deliver the Power to Change public awareness campaign that launched on 28 January 2025. The campaign aligns with Gillen themes and aims to tackle the underpinning behaviours and attitudes that can fuel sexual offending and gender-based violence, including violence against women and girls.

The campaign consists of a series of radio advertisements, content on social media and billboard and Adshell posters. The PSNI is also leading community engagement that will utilise the campaign assets to start face to face conversations with local community groups and youth forums. All communications signpost to the bespoke Power To Change website that includes a range of information, guidance and advice. In the few months since launch, the ‘reach’ of the campaign has been very impressive, with over 1.4 million impressions on Tik Tok and over 2.4 million impressions on YouTube.

- Social Media and Jury Responsibilities: The Gillen Review said ‘*social media must not be permitted to pollute the stream of justice and defeat the interests of both complainants and accused persons*’. The Review therefore makes a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring jurors understand the consequences of both researching and / or posting information about their trial and to give the judiciary additional powers to deal with any breach.

The DOJ, in conjunction with the Lady Chief Justice’s Office (LCJO) and the NI Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) has published a booklet that sets out guidance for jurors on their legal responsibilities, contempt of court and on the laws around their use of social media during and after trials. All sworn jurors are required to read the booklet prior to the commencement of the trial and posters highlighting this

information are in place in all courthouses. The booklet is also available on the Department's website.

The jury booklet is also available on the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) Hub, which provides resources to support teachers. The availability of the booklet has been highlighted in CCEA's quarterly e-bulletin to all teachers as well as on their social media channels. The Department of Education has been requested to promote this resource as part of the Learning for Life and Work curriculum which aims to encourage greater civic responsibility and includes modules on juries, jury responsibilities and contempt laws.

- Reducing delay is crucial to improving victims' experience of the justice system and reducing attrition. While there is more work to be done, progress is being made, including:
  - The first stage of the NI Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Act was implemented on 17 October 2022. The new committal process means the use of oral evidence during committal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court for new cases was abolished. This change simplifies the committal process, reduces costs and delay, which benefits both victims and witnesses and the accused. The Department is working with criminal justice partners to take forward the second phase of committal reform ('direct committal'), which aims to remove the traditional committal process entirely for the most serious offences, with the majority of cases being directly transferred to the Crown Court at the first court appearance in the Magistrates' court.
  - Work has progressed with the Indictable Cases Process (ICP) for serious sexual offence cases, Following the Gillen Review, the PPS and PSNI made several significant changes to their case processing arrangements in line with the ICP principles. These changes are currently being documented and combined into one process. This work is ongoing with the Serious Sexual Offences Process (SSOP) part of the wider Speeding Up Justice Programme of Work looking at early engagement. This work is ongoing.
  - Case Progression Officers are in place in all Crown Court venues and are working to ensure that all procedural or administrative matters in relation to Crown court cases are being progressed by the relevant agencies and that, as far as possible, any blockages or impediments to effective case progression are addressed.
- A number of research projects recommended in the Gillen Review are nearing completion. The findings of this research will help inform policy development and the introduction of new measures and services to assist victims. This research includes:
  - A report setting out baseline figure for attrition and identify underlying reasons for attrition has been drafted and is being quality assured. This information will inform the introduction of further measures to reduce attrition.

- Research into the use of previous sexual history evidence in serious sexual offence trials. Under the Queens University Belfast / DoJ Collaborative Studentship Programme, a PHD student is in her final year of a three-year research project to consider the extent of Article 28 applications in relation to the introduction of Previous Sexual History (PSH) evidence in trials; to what extent is evidence of PSH admitted in the absence of an Article 28 application and how is such evidence handled within the trial context. The project will also consider if in light of the empirical data, further reforms are needed in this area. The research report is expected later this year.
- Research into the use of Restorative Justice in sexual offences. While the Review advises caution around this highly sensitive subject, it also recommends research should be conducted to establish if a victim-led restorative justice process for sexual offences is possible. Again, under the Queens University Belfast / DoJ Collaborative Studentship Programme, a PHD student is in her final year of a three-year research project on this topic and her report is expected later this year.
- Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews are not only crucial for the investigation process, but also have an important part in a victim's overall experience of the criminal justice system. The implementation of Gillen Review recommendations has resulted in:
  - ABE interview suites have been refurbished to a simplistic but desirable standard to avoid sources of noise, distractions or a cluttered screen image;
  - Children's toys or props are available should they be required;
  - ABE interview training has been reviewed and improved with input received from Registered Intermediaries, child psychologists and members of the legal profession; and
  - A pilot involving a cadre of police officers and social care staff specifically trained to conduct ABE interviews is delivering important improvements. However, the extension and further roll-out of the ABE cadre to other Health Trust areas is subject to additional funding becoming available.
  - The PSNI led ABE Working Group has been established to oversee further improvements to the ABE process, including delivery of the remaining Gillen recommendations in this area.
- Joint work by PSNI and PPS to improve Disclosure procedures. PSNI and PPS colleagues have continued to lead work to improve the operation of the disclosure process. Under the Disclosure Improvement Plan, improved training has been delivered to prosecutors and police officers and new file standards have been agreed. As a result of work on file standards, the volume of prosecution files being returned to PSNI as a result of failing requirements has dropped from an average of almost 78% in 2020 to 11% in 2024.

## PART A

- Relating to the disclosure process, the Department aims to legislate within the current mandate to enhance the protection of complainants' personal information in the third-party material disclosure process. This includes information such as counselling notes and some social service or medical records. The measures are being progressed under the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill to be introduced in Spring 2026.
- Improved training for the criminal justice organisations including the Police and PPS, as well as solicitors, barristers, court staff and the judiciary is intended to deliver cultural and organisational change, to benefit victims through a more trauma informed and sensitive approach.

The Gillen Training Group led on the development and roll out of a trauma-informed Learning Framework for frontline professionals across the criminal justice system to enhance the understanding, skills and sensitivity of those working with victims of sexual crime. Over the past couple of years training has included:

- Training delivered to almost 5,000 police officers across a diverse range of topics such as rape myths, conducting ABE interviews, dealing with those affected by trauma, developing specialist skills to deal with child victims and personal wellbeing training for those officers involved in the investigation of serious sexual offences.
- Members of the Bar and Law Society taking part in specific designed courses aimed at raising awareness and supporting the needs of Vulnerable Witnesses.
- Judicial training included the attendance of the Lady Chief Justice, a Lord Justice of Appeal and 5 Crown Court Judges at the Judicial College's Continuation Training in Serious Sexual Offences course which enables delegates to try these cases with sensitivity and confidence, equipped with knowledge of current law and practice.

### Legislative changes

Several important reforms recommended in the Gillen Review, were introduced as a result of the further implementation of The Justice (Sexual Offences And Trafficking Victims) NI Act 2022 including:

- The exclusion of the public from court in serious sexual offence trials and appeal hearings;
- The extension of existing lifelong anonymity for victims until 25 years after death; and
- Increased penalties for breach on anonymity.

A number of new offences legislated for in the 2022 Act were also commenced. These address a range of particular behaviours which have become increasingly prevalent within society and provide additional protections. They include:

- Four offences which capture the specific and highly intrusive behaviours of what are commonly known as ‘up-skirting’ and ‘down-blousing’. They relate to the observing or recording of a person’s genitals, buttocks, breasts or underwear without that person’s consent;
- the offence of “sending an unwanted sexual image” to capture the behaviour of those who intentionally send an image of their genitals or sexual activity to another person without that person’s consent, commonly known as “cyber-flashing”;
- four new offences designed to tackle the particular behaviour of an adult pretending to be a child and making a communication with a child under 16 with a view to sexual grooming. These act as a precursor to more serious grooming behaviours and build on existing child grooming protections;
- the offence of non-fatal strangulation or asphyxiation;
- extending the scope of the established abuse of position of trust offences to capture those adults in a position of trust who knowingly coach, teach, train, supervise or instruct a child on a regular basis in the area of sport or religion.

Given the absence of an Assembly for prolonged periods over the past 6 years, it will not be possible to introduce all of the Gillen recommended legislation. However, where it is not possible to introduce legislation in this mandate, we will continue preparation work, including where necessary, further consultation, so we are in a state of readiness to proceed early in the next mandate.

#### Next steps

The Gillen implementation programme is set to run to 2027 and as well as developing and expanding existing projects and introducing the legislation mentioned above, we also hope to:

- Continue to develop plans and arrangements for a pre-recorded cross examination pilot. This project has complex interdependencies with other workstreams, and its launch will be subject to resolving several outstanding issues, including legal aid changes, and to securing funding;
- A Working Group, led by the Gillen Team is developing a social media campaign to raise awareness and challenge rape myths. We expect to launch the campaign before the end of the business year; and,
- another working group is working on the development of guidance for the media so they might adopt a more sensitive and effective way of reporting sexual offences.

#### Commissioner for Victims of Crime

In March 2022, the Minister of Justice announced the public appointment of Geraldine Hanna as the first Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime for Northern Ireland; the Commissioner Designate took up office in June 2022.

This role provides a voice for all victims of crime, representing their needs and interests with the aim of helping to drive systemic improvements across the criminal justice system that will improve the experience of victims of crime.

During 2023/24, the Commissioner Designate met with 64 individual victims of crime. Many had engaged with various stakeholders within the criminal justice system and reported common themes to the Commissioner Designate such as:

- Delay;
- Lack of resources;
- Lack of communication (PSNI/PPS/Victim and Witness Care Unit);
- Failure to Investigate (PSNI);
- Poor practices (NICTS and legal professionals); and
- Utilisation of the Remote Evidence Centres (RECs).

Victims also advised of difficulties with stakeholders outside of the criminal justice system, including health, education and housing. Whilst the Commissioner Designate has met with the relevant statutory agencies to discuss and highlight these issues, these currently sit outside of the remit of the Commissioner Designate's office.

Research projects carried out by the Commissioner Designate's Office include:

- Victim Survey;
- Family Courts;
- Male Experience of Intimate Partner Violence; and
- Victims Personal Statements.

The Commissioner Designate represents all victims of crime equally regardless of their Section 75 category, however she has also been tasked with having a specific focus on particularly vulnerable groups of victims, including victims of domestic and sexual abuse and victims of hate crime.

The Department continues to deliver the Victim & Witness Charters Communications Plan, including:

- Promotion of the Victim and Witness Charters on social media, at conferences and networking opportunities.
- Attendance at events and festivals, such as the Balmoral Show, Pride and Mela.

### **Hate Crime Legislation, Safer Communities Directorate**

The DoJ is currently implementing a number of recommendations and developing policy aimed at improving the criminal justice system's response to addressing hate crime in law and providing redress to victims, following Judge Marrinan's Review of Hate Crime Legislation.

The delivery of hate crime legislation in this mandate remains a key priority for DoJ. In September 2024, the Minister updated the Assembly on plans to progress hate crime legislation, renewing her commitment to bring forward the most impactful elements of

legislation for victims of hate crime. Provisions will be split between the Sentencing Bill and Victims & Witnesses of Crime Bill.

This legislation will establish a statutory aggravation model for hate crimes, recognise intersectionality for current protected groups and provide enhanced protection for victims of hate crime. The proposed legislative provisions will modernise race hate crime in law in NI and provide a more robust system to sanction offenders.

Executive approval for the inclusion of hate crime provisions in the Sentencing Bill was granted in December 2024.

Work on developing policies to be included in the phase two public consultation has continued with the intention of developing a public consultation on these issues after the Sentencing Bill has passed through the Assembly. The remaining policy aspects relate to consideration of three strategic themes:

- Additional protected characteristics of sex/gender/variations of sex characteristics and age (recommendation 9);
- Stirring Up Offences – on the remaining sub-parts not covered in the phase one consultation (recommendation 14); and
- A statutory duty for public authorities to remove hate expressions from buildings and public spaces where they carry out their functions (recommendation 15).

Engagement has continued with key stakeholders to keep them updated on progress and to hear their views. There was positive engagement with relevant third sector and criminal justice organisations during 2024/25. Engaging with victims of hate crime and with policy advocates remains an important function of our work and has included engagement with the Hate Crime Advocacy Service Disability subgroup and TEO's Racial Equality subgroup.

The Department was also active in responding to the racially motivated unrest in August 2024 and convened the Community Safety Response Group (CSRG) which is a cross-Departmental / multi-agency group with representation that includes: The Executive Office, Department for Infrastructure, Police Service of Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Councils. This group allows agencies to share information and to co-ordinate actions in responding to these issues at a strategic and operational level.

Enhanced protection for victims of hate crime remained a priority during 2024/25. Direct support for hate crime victims is provided through the Hate Crime Advocacy Service [HCAS], jointly funded by PSNI and the DoJ. It supports victims of hate crime through the criminal justice process, signposts them to relevant support services, and can assist with third party reporting to the PSNI

#### **Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime**

The Programme uses an outcomes-based approach for measuring progress known as

Benefits Realisation. Benefits are simply positive and measurable changes that will help address the problem. Benefits are defined, agreed and monitored by everyone involved with the Programme. There are 18 intermediary benefits to realise over the course of Phase 2 of the Programme (2021-2025). Progress is measured at project and programme level. This helps to inform investment decisions and gives the Programme an evidence-base to refine and improve its approach as it goes. The benefits are divided across three areas of; Community Resilience, Keeping People Safe; and Protective Factors. Further information can be found at [www.endingtheharm.com](http://www.endingtheharm.com).

**Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS)**

The NI Courts and Tribunals Services (NICTS) Justice Video Platform (also known as JVP) is a video conferencing solution used NICTS to enable external parties to connect to a court to participate in a remote or hybrid hearing. The solution uses Webex as the video conferencing platform and enables external connections from a range of devices, such as PCs/laptops, mobile devices, video conferencing systems and standard telephones.

All courts in NICTS are enabled with video conferencing and each one has been set up with a unique Webex link to allow external participants to connect to the court remotely. Participants can only attend remotely if they have received prior permission to attend using this method instead of physically attending the court. NICTS will provide participants with the connection details for the court they are due to attend. The rollout of the JVP across NICTS will commence on 16 September 2025.

**3** Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No (go to Q.4)

Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

The Department's Equality & Staff Support Services (ESSS) Branch proactively encourages business areas to engage at an early stage to ensure that equality issues are considered at the beginning of the screening process. The ESSS has issued various intranet articles and e-mailed colleagues highlighting sources of information available on the equality section of the Department's intranet site including links to ECNI available materials and training videos on Equality Screening and Equality Impact Assessment over the reporting period.

In line with the Department's Equality Scheme commitment to consider any good practice or guidance issued by ECNI, the Equality Unit also shares relevant information and guidance with all staff. For example, staff have been made aware of various training sessions and webinars offered by the ECNI and also on-line equality and diversity training available via LINKS, the NICS provider of courses available centrally.

The Equality Officer also meets with relevant officials to discuss and give feedback in relation to screening forms, highlighting the importance of ensuring, where appropriate, that screenings are evidence based and also monitoring of policies as necessary. This has resulted in an increased awareness of equality generally in respect of available training/resources and the importance of effective evidence-based screening throughout the Department.

**3a** With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

As a result of the on-going general awareness throughout the Department of equality obligations, highlighting available training/resource and importance effective

PART A

evidence based screening and need for monitoring where appropriate, it is hoped that generally all section 75 groups will benefit through the policy development process.

**3b** What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)*

As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

Click or tap here to enter text.

Other *(please specify and give details):*

See 3a above

## **Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures**

### **Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)**

**4** Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes, organisation wide

PART A

- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Paragraph 2.6 of the Department's Equality Scheme sets out that, where relevant, employees job descriptions and performance plans reflect their contributions to the discharge of the section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the equality scheme.

Given its functions in relation to section 75, relevant staff within the Department's Equality & Staff Support Services (ESSS) Branch have Equality duties included as part of their job descriptions.

This is also reflected, as appropriate, in other business areas across the Department. Section 75 duties are also reflected as objectives in the personal performance plans of relevant staff within ESSS. These objectives are subject to annual appraisal.

Personal Development actions are developed and reviewed biannually to identify any new training requirements.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

As question 4 above.

PART A

6 In the 2024-25 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2024-25 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Equality action plans/measures**

7 Within the 2024-25 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:

n/a

Actions ongoing:

n/a

Actions to commence:

n/a

Please provide any details and examples *(in addition to question 2)*:

A review of the Department's Equality Scheme has been completed and has been shared with ECNI for review/comment. An Audit of Inequalities (Aol) has been recently completed on Departmental functions and activities to inform an updated Equality Action Plan (EAP) for the next five year period which is currently in draft form. A 5 year Departmental DAP has also been drafted. Work has been ongoing throughout.

PART A

Following a period of consultation it is anticipated this will now be completed finalised on or before the 2025/26 financial year.

- 8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2024-25 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

A review of the Department's Equality Scheme has been completed and has been shared with ECNI for review/comment. An Audit of Inequalities (AoI) has been recently completed on Departmental functions and activities to inform an updated Equality Action Plan (EAP) for the next five year period which is currently in draft form. A 5 year Departmental DAP has also been drafted. Work has been ongoing throughout. Following a period of consultation it is anticipated this will now be completed finalised on or before the 2025/26 financial year.

- 9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2024-25 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

**Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)**

- 10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: (*tick one box only*)

- All the time
- Sometimes
- Never

- 11** Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2024-25 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

Work taken forward by Reducing Offending Division to deliver on the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice is done so through consultation and the direct involvement of not only third sector organisations representing the children’s sector in Northern Ireland, but also direct engagement with children and families who have lived experience of the youth justice system. Children’s Sector non-governmental organisations are represented both on the Strategic Framework’s Implementation Group – the high-level group overseeing the implementation of the Framework – and also on Task and Finish Groups established to take forward specific elements of work under the Framework. This ensures the voices and views of children and young people are facilitated and taken into account in the development and updating of policy and operational practice. One such example is the pre-consultation and engagement work that took place to develop an adult and a child-friendly version of a consultation on a new single community sentence for children (for launch in 2025/26).

- 12** In the 2024-25 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: (*tick all that apply*)

- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations

PART A

Other (*please specify*): Facilitation of age-appropriate engagement with children and families with lived experience of the justice system- (ROD).

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

As per answer 11 above (ROD)

Responses were received from a range of organisations representing the following categories – race, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, political opinion.

**13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2024-25 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**14** Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2024-25 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes

No

Not applicable – no commitment to review

**Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)**

Available from: [Equality | Department of Justice \(justice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://justice-ni.gov.uk)

PART A

**15** Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

**12**

**16** Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2024-25:

**8** Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.

**NIL** Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.

**NIL** Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

**17** Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

- Consultation on Repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824 and the Vagrancy (IRELAND) Act 1847
- Vehicle recovery storage and disposal statutory charges review.
- Consultation on the contents of the codes of practice as specified under Article 53A of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989
- Consultation on the draft planning fees regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024
- Consultation on proposals for a Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill
- Consultation on draft Police Pensions Amendment No.2 Regulations Northern Ireland 2024
- Public Consultation on Revise7 Remuneration Rates (Civil, Family and Criminal) for Solicitors and Barristers
- Consultation on Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan

**18** Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

Yes

No concerns were raised

No

Not applicable

PART A

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)**

The outcome of any assessments are published on the Department's website.

- 19** Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)**

- 20** From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2024-25 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No, already taken place

No, scheduled to take place at a later date

Not applicable

Please provide any details:

The Department is liaising with the ECNI regarding the on-going challenges faced by Criminal Justice Sector in collection of S75 Data.

A review of the Department's Audit of Inequalities (Aol) is ongoing for the 25/26 financial year. This may highlight gaps and result in future monitoring.

**21** In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

Yes

No

Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2024-25 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

Not applicable for the period.

**23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime has questions in the NI Life and Times survey and Young Life and Times survey along with action research evaluations available across a range of projects available on [www.endingtheharm.com](http://www.endingtheharm.com)

#### **Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)**

**24** Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2024-25, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

All staff had access to various e-learning courses available through an on-line platform including the Equality and Diversity Essentials e-Learning program. This training is mandatory for all enrolled staff.

Staff within the Equality and Staff Support Services (ESSS) Branch and the wider Department have attended various training courses offered by the ECNI during the reporting period. This has included training webinars offered on: Section 75 & Screening Training, How to Screen a Policy, Section 75 – How to Equality Impact Assess a Policy and Section - 75 The Monitoring Requirements webinar.

During the reporting period, the Prison Service College delivered initial Induction Training to 52 new recruits. This training included Autism Awareness, Equality & Diversity, Dignity at Work, Human Rights, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, Just a Minute, Disability Awareness, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, SafeTalk, Mental Health, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), Females in Custody and Supporting People At Risk Evolution (SPAR Evo).

DoJ staff also undertook JAM Card training during this period.

Online and virtual training sessions in relation to Wellbeing were also promoted across the Department.

Three members of Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service staff have completed webinars on 'Section 75 Duties – A Focus on Screening' and 'Section 75 duties and Equality Assessments' and all staff have completed mandatory diversity training as required.

- 25** Please provide **any examples** of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

As detailed above, the NI Prison Service College delivered initial Induction Training to 52 new recruits. This training included Autism Awareness, Equality & Diversity, Dignity at Work, Human Rights, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, Just a Minute, Disability Awareness, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, SafeTalk, Mental Health, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), Females in Custody and Supporting People At Risk Evolution (SPAR Evo).

Staff within the Department also undertook JAM ('Just A Minute') Card online training during the reporting period as part of an NICS initiative. This training has provided useful information for staff, particularly frontline staff to understand the needs of people with a disability when accessing services particularly front facing.

#### **Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)**

- 26** Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2024-25, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

PART A

Nothing specific for the reporting period.

**Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)**

**27** How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2024-25?

Insert number here: **NIL**

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Click or tap here to enter text.

### Section 3: Looking Forward

28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

A review and update to the Equality Scheme has been completed and is currently with the ECNI for review/comment. The ECNI has been kept informed of developments and Department has continued to align its activities with the Equality Scheme.

29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

A review of the Department's Equality Scheme has been completed and has been shared with ECNI for review/comment. An Audit of Inequalities (AoI) has been recently completed on Departmental functions and activities to inform an updated Equality Action Plan (EAP) for the next five year period which is currently in draft form. A 5 year Departmental DAP has also been drafted. Work has been ongoing throughout. Following a period of consultation it is anticipated this will now be completed finalised on or before the 2025/26 financial year.

30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):

General advice from the ECNI in relation to screening and particularly in respect of the budget and other equality matters when developing our Disability & Equality Actions Plans for the next five year period.

**PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans**

**1. Number of action measures for this reporting period that have been:**

<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Fully achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved

**2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.**

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs <sup>i</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>ii</sup>
Regional	Identify and encourage participation of disabled people in public life including employment.	Positively encourage and promote equality of opportunity in recruitment, career development and management support for disabled staff and candidates	The DoJ is committed to promoting diversity in public appointments and through the use of enhanced statements. That includes welcoming applications from disabled candidates. The NICS has in place a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for applicants with a disability that meets the legal definition under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

PART B

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	NICTS - Three members of staff have completed webinars on 'Section 75 Duties – A Focus on Screening' and 'Section 75 duties and Equality Assessments' and all staff have completed mandatory diversity training as required.	All staff are reminded about the need to complete mandatory Diversity training.	Increased awareness of staff.
2	NIPS – Raise staff awareness of specific barriers faced by people with disabilities.	Ensure guidance is available and up-to date on the departmental intranet on disability equality legislation and related disability awareness information.	Following on from NIPS' attendance at the "Be the Change" Leadership Programme and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Conference a significant volume of awareness and trauma sensitive approaches to practice and training have been delivered in partnership with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to become a trauma informed organisation through culture, policy and practice. A number of NIPS staff have also completed an Early Intervention Transformation Programme in a Trauma Informed Practice 'train the trainer' programme to sustain the delivery of the training programmes across the prison service workforce.
3	NIPS – Compliance with Statutory Disability Duties.	All staff will have current training and access to a series of awareness sessions on diversity/disability related issues.	NIPS achieved 'Just A Minute' compliancy again during a refresh in 2024. In order for an organisation to become JAM Card compliant, 60% of its staff are required to complete the JAM Card training. During the reporting period, the Prison Service College delivered Initial Induction Training to 52 new recruits. This training included Autism Awareness, Equality &

PART B

			<p>Diversity, Dignity at Work, Human Rights, Just a Minute, Disability Awareness, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, SafeTalk, Mental Health, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), Females in Custody and Supporting People At Risk Evolution (SPAR). NIPS has also continued to roll out Makaton training to all staff to assist in providing services to people with communication difficulties. All prisoners complete an initial assessment with Prison Healthcare on arrival and a fuller assessment within 72 hours. Where disability concerns are identified, a referral is made to both Healthcare and Psychology and adjustments made to support that individual. Advice is routinely sought from the Equality Commission, British Deaf Association and other external bodies as necessary. Following engagement with BDA and NI Institute for the Blind, NIPS has made further improvements to support deaf and blind prisoners. A number of hearing and visually impaired prisoners were detained during the reporting period. As a result of the reasonable adjustments made, there were no issues raised by the prisoners or the staff caring for them. Reasonable adjustments included the use of staff with interpretation skills and the purchase of watches and pillows that vibrate in the event of an alarm sounding. Modified Zoom meetings where the prisoner can write and display what they have written are also used. Braille Units in the prisons produced 10 full-scale braille novels, along with a large number of menus and information sheets for external organisations. A member of staff has trained as an Assisted Animal Therapy Practitioner, which permits</p>
--	--	--	---

PART B

			her to train other staff to carry out the role, with the aim of engaging with OCN to create a bespoke qualification.
--	--	--	--

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Initiatives to identify and reduce Disability Hate Crime.	To provide support services for victims of crime, including disability hate crime which helps to fulfil our commitments in the Victims and Witnesses Strategy.	The Hate Crime Advocacy Service, jointly funded by PSNI and DoJ, chair a disability subgroup which meets quarterly to liaise with disability organisations to raise awareness of disability hate crime, reporting mechanisms to PSNI and available support for victims.
2	NIPS – Ensure accessible information/guidance available including availability in alternative formats	Provide a range of materials in alternative format including use of tablet translation, braille, foreign language translation, and via the Big Word translation service.	All NICTS Court locations have the Loop system fitted. These hearing loops can be used in conjunction with the Big Word by Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Services (PECCS) at Court locations. Laminated Cards are in place with icons and an area on which to write with whiteboard makers are present in all PECCS custody areas and vehicles to assist staff in communicating with deaf persons in custody. A Braille book is available in every custody area for use by visually impaired persons.

PART B

<p>3</p>	<p>NIPS – Provide accessible information for people who are remanded into custody at court.</p>	<p>Availability of a Hearing Loop system in Laganside Courts PECCS to provide assistance to those defendants that suffer from hearing loss and have hearing aids. Braille is also available. An information sheet to explain the role of Prisoner Escort Service (PECCS) and the transportation process is available NIPS had previously provided Hearing loop systems at all 3 prison establishments. All 17 NICTS Court locations have the Loop system fitted. These hearing loops can be used in conjunction with the Big Word by PECCS at Court locations. PART B44Hearing loop systems are also available in the visits area at all three prison establishments. Alternative arrangements can be provided for people who are vulnerable or have mental health issue using Video Conferencing systems. Assistance made available for inmates with dyslexia and/or general literacy difficulties. This year NIPS procured and installed Read &amp; Write software on the prisoner education system.</p>	<p>NIPS have provided computer tablets with translation software to Foreign nationals to assist during their detention in all 3 prisons. Video Conferencing suites have been installed at all three establishments to facilitate court appearances without the necessity to transport prisoners in person. This is of great benefit to all prisoners but particularly those with mobility issues and other disabilities. NIPS has also procured and installed Read&amp; Write software on the prisoner education system for use by inmates with dyslexia and/or general literacy difficulties. The Big Word and Language Line translation / interpretation services were used during the reporting period as necessary across the PECCS Establishment. Hearing loops are also in use within establishments. Tablets are also used for prisoners with hearing issues. Laminated Cards are in place with icons and an area on which to write with whiteboard makers are present in all custody areas and vehicles to assist staff in communicating with deaf persons in custody. Following engagement with BDA and NI Institute for the Blind, NIPS has made further improvements to support deaf and blind prisoners. A number of hearing and visually impaired prisoners were detained during the reporting period. As a result of the reasonable adjustments made, there were no issues raised by the prisoners or the staff caring for them. Reasonable adjustments included the use of staff</p>
----------	---	--	---

PART B

			<p>with interpretation skills and the purchase of watches and pillows that vibrate in the event of an alarm sounding. Modified Zoom meetings where the prisoner can write and display what they have written are also used. Braille Units in the prisons produced 10 full-scale braille novels, along with a large number of menus and information sheets for external organisations. NIPS has introduced animals and therapeutic dogs across its establishments as part of an animal husbandry therapy initiative for prisoners. The therapeutic value of looking after and caring for animals is widely recognised. Along with the 'Taking the lead' programme these initiatives encourage and promote personal growth, development and provide individuals with a chance to gain a range of skills relevant to life in the community and workplace.</p>
4	<p>NIPS – Improving quality of life for people with disabilities</p>	<p>Provide suitable accommodation for prisoners with disabilities</p>	<p>Ongoing – Reasonable adjustments are made routinely where needs are identified and incorporated into the design of all new projects. Davis House which opened in early 2020 is fully compliant with DDA Regulations and has implemented further sensory measures with thoughtful use of colours and finishes. Projects under construction at present and designed to meet DDA requirements include: Magilligan Runkerry 10 bed new build, Alpha House Ablutions (2 areas); Maghaberry, Bann House Ablutions (6 areas)</p>

PART B

			Silver Command Control Room, Virtual Visits Booths (2Nr); Hydebank Prisoner Reception, low mobility accommodation room, with washing and toilet facilities, Waiting Room, interview desk etc.
5	NIPS – Enhancing the opportunity to learn for everyone	Improving outcomes for prisoners	Recognising the growing need amongst the prison population NIPS has made provision through arrangements with Belfast Met to recruit an additional Special Educational Needs tutor.

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

PART B

	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
--	----------------------------------	----------------------------------	----------------------------------

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones/ Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

PART B

2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

No new monitoring tools have been implemented during this reporting year.

(b) Quantitative

No new monitoring tools have been implemented during this reporting year.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Please select

If yes please outline below:

PART B

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
2	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
3	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
4	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
5	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

A new Disability Action Plan for the next five years is currently being developed.

---

<sup>i</sup> **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

<sup>ii</sup> **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.