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**Call for Views  
New Strategy  
to  
Reduce Offending and Reoffending**

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**Creating better life chances and choices**



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## Ministerial Foreword

Reducing offending and reoffending is a whole of government priority. It matters because of the harm caused to victims, families and communities across Northern Ireland and because improving safety and opportunity benefits society as a whole.

We know that offending and reoffending are complex issues. They are shaped by a wide range of social, economic and health-related factors, including poverty, trauma, poor health, barriers to education and employment, housing insecurity and social exclusion. These challenges cannot be addressed by the justice system alone. Lasting progress depends on a whole system approach, including with communities, those delivering services and those with lived experience.

That is why we are developing a new long-term strategy to reduce offending and reoffending. The strategy will set out a clear direction for the years ahead, informed by evidence and engagement on what approaches are most effective in reducing offending and reoffending over the long term. Its aim is to reduce harm, improve public safety and support better life chances, recognising that sustainable change takes time and requires coordinated action across many parts of the system.

This Call for Views is an important first step in developing that strategy and represents an opportunity to listen carefully and to learn. We want to hear about what has and has not worked in Northern Ireland from people with lived experience of the justice system, victims and survivors of crime, community and voluntary organisations, people working on the front line, academics and members of the public. Recognising the challenging financial climate the public sector is operating within, we are also seeking evidence of different policies or resourcing approaches that demonstrate positive impacts by reducing harm, offending and / or reoffending. Your insights will help us build a clearer understanding of what drives offending and reoffending, what helps prevent harm and where future efforts can make the greatest difference.

We encourage you to take part.

## Introduction

Reducing offending and reoffending remains a significant challenge for Northern Ireland, with serious and lasting impacts for victims of crime, as well as for individuals, families, communities and public services. While Northern Ireland remains one of the safest places to live in the UK, offending and repeat offending continue to cause harm, undermine community confidence and affect life chances, creating long-term social and economic costs that extend well beyond the justice system.

The Programme for Government (2024-2027) – ‘Doing What Matters Most’ – includes a commitment to develop a new, evidence-based strategy to reduce offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland. This reflects a shared recognition that reducing offending and reoffending is not solely a justice issue and that meaningful and sustained progress depends on coordinated action across the whole of government, alongside partners in the voluntary, community and academic sectors.

Departments are operating within a very challenging financial environment. As a result, the new strategy must be realistic, affordable and evidence led. This requires a strong focus on interventions that demonstrate the greatest impact, better use of existing resources and reduced duplication across services. Delivery will also need to be carefully phased to ensure that commitments are financially sustainable within budgetary constraints.

This Call for Views marks the beginning of a longer-term strategy development process. It provides an opportunity to step back, reflect on what is currently known and consider how a future strategy should be shaped to respond more effectively to the complex and inter-connected factors that influence offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland. Views gathered through this early engagement process will help inform the strategic direction, priorities and long-term outcomes of the strategy, ensuring it is grounded in evidence, lived experience and insights from across society.

## Strategic Context

Northern Ireland's current approach is set out in the [2013 Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending](#) and the [2015 Supporting Change: A Strategic Approach to Desistance](#). These frameworks emphasised early intervention, accountability and rehabilitation and together have guided efforts over the past decade. However, the Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) 2023 [report on Reducing Adult Reoffending](#) and the subsequent 2025 [report from the Public Accounts Committee \(PAC\)](#), highlighted the need for a more contemporary, measurable and joined up response to these issues. In the current financial climate, these findings reinforce the need for a more preventative, coordinated and outcome-focused approach that makes better use of existing investment and reduces avoidable demand on the justice system and wider public services.

The new strategy will therefore build on the learning from previous strategies to set a clearer, shared direction across the whole of government. It must respond more effectively to wider societal challenges by recognising the complexities of individual-level factors, alongside wider social and economic factors that can drive offending and harm in Northern Ireland and ways to work collectively to address these and improve outcomes for individuals, communities and wider society.

Through our shared PfG commitment to Safer Communities, it is important to embed principles that promote a harm reduction approach, focus on early intervention, trauma-informed practice, partnership-driven delivery and prevention. This new strategy seeks to reduce both the drivers and impacts of offending, which can produce a dual benefit by also reducing cumulative harms experienced by individuals and families, alongside the harms experienced by victims, communities and frontline services.

The foundation of this strategy will be informed by evidence on the causes of offending, reoffending and harm. Evidence indicates that a range of social, economic and structural factors can increase vulnerability to offending and later involvement with the justice system. These include poverty and deprivation, unstable or poor housing, educational disadvantage, unemployment or insecure work, mental ill

health, substance use, social isolation, care experience, inter-generational experiences of offending and limited access to timely and effective support services. These factors do not determine individual outcomes but are widely recognised as increasing exposure to risk and reducing protective factors over time.

In parallel, individual factors such as personal traits and behaviours, life circumstances, peer relationships and offence-specific decision-making, could also increase a person's risk of offending. Understanding different approaches that balance prevention and early support, alongside accountability, behavioural change and proportionate risk management, while maintaining a clear focus on public protection and the needs of victims and communities – is critical to strategy development.

While not explicitly nor definitively linked – we do recognise that many who enter the justice system may have formally diagnosed, or self-reported / undiagnosed special educational needs or neurodiverse conditions. Early identification, reasonable adjustments and inclusive education and transition pathways, alongside increased professional awareness of neurodiversity, can act as important protective factors and contribute to improved outcomes.

In the development of the strategy, we are keen to explore different types of support to prevent first time offending and reoffending, including prevention and early intervention, recognising that the greatest opportunity to reduce harm lies in acting earlier in the life course, before patterns of disadvantage, exclusion and offending become entrenched. This includes supporting children, young people, families and communities at risk and intervening at key transition points where vulnerability is known to increase, helping to reduce longer-term demand on the justice system.

## **What We Currently Know**

Research and data consistently show that many people who come into contact with the justice system have experienced multiple and overlapping challenges. Experiences such as childhood adversity, poor educational outcomes, substance use, mental ill health and homelessness are common and frequently interconnected.

These experiences tend to accumulate over the life course, shaping life chances, behaviours and patterns of contact with public services, often long before any involvement with the criminal justice system.

Research on the prevalence and impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland further strengthens this understanding. Exposure to trauma, neglect and instability in childhood is associated with poorer outcomes across health, education and employment, with an increased likelihood of later justice involvement. The cumulative nature of these experiences underlines the importance of prevention and early intervention, alongside effective responses to offending behaviour, in reducing harm over the longer term.

At the same time, offending and reoffending causes significant harm to victims, families, businesses and communities, contributing to fear of crime and wider social and economic costs. Any future strategic approach must reflect these impacts, ensuring that efforts to prevent offending and reduce reoffending also realise secondary benefits that contribute to safer communities, increased public confidence and better outcomes for all those affected by crime.

## **Early Scoping and Engagement**

Early scoping for this strategy included a Strategic Insights Lab (iLab) process led by the Department of Finance. This involved senior officials from six departments, relevant agencies, criminal justice organisations and engagement with third sector partners and academics. This was complemented by engagement and feedback from people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

## **Purpose of this Call for Views**

This Call for Views is the first formal stage in developing a new longer-term strategy to reduce offending and reoffending. It seeks to:

- gather insights, information and evidence on the wider societal issues that contribute to offending and reoffending (including whether the underlying causes for initial offending and reoffending are different);
- inform the strategic vision, priorities and long-term outcomes;

- support the effective use of resources, recognising the need to prioritise interventions with the strongest evidence of impact within a constrained funding environment; and
- ensure research and data shape future direction.

## **Why Your Views Matter**

We want to capture your views, experience and evidence. We are particularly interested in what people think would make the biggest difference to reducing offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland and how we can ensure that the new strategy is focused, practical and delivers measurable impact. We want to understand what matters most, what evidence suggests works well or not and what should be prioritised for further development.

Reducing offending and reoffending requires a whole of government approach. Only by working together, and by listening to people with direct experience alongside professional and academic expertise, can we collectively address the root causes of harmful and offending behaviour and break these cycles of harm. Your insights will help shape a strategy that is ambitious, evidence-based and grounded in the realities of life in Northern Ireland today.

To help inform the long-term strategic direction for the new strategy, we are inviting views, evidence and ideas from across society. We welcome views from individuals and organisations, including people with personal experience, or on the cusp, of contact with the criminal justice system, victims and survivors of crime, support organisations, frontline professionals, academics and researchers and members of the public. We also welcome relevant research, data, learning from best practice and views on what should be prioritised, what works well and where change is needed.

## **How this Call for Views will be used**

This Call for Views is an early engagement exercise at the start of the strategy development process. The findings will help shape the overall strategic direction, focus and ambition of the longer-term strategy to reducing offending and reoffending.

Following the close of this Call for Views, responses will be analysed and a summary report will be published online.

Insights from this stage, alongside existing evidence, research, learning from previous frameworks, the iLab findings and wider stakeholder engagement, will collectively inform the development of a draft long-term strategy. A formal public consultation on the draft strategy will follow in 2027, setting out more detailed proposals and providing a further opportunity for comment before the strategy is finalised.

## Support for those affected by this Call for Views

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised, help and support is available. **Victim Support NI** is an independent charity which helps people affected by crime. They offer a free and confidential service, whether or not the crime has been reported, regardless of how long ago the crime took place. Victim Support NI can give you emotional support and practical advice to help you recover from the impact of crime and move on with your life. They will not pass on the details of your case to anyone, except in cases where they believe someone is at risk of serious harm and needs immediate help.

Victim Support NI works in partnership with a range of organisations who can provide you with the necessary support and information you need, dependant on your individual needs. They can be **contacted** at **028 9024 3133**, or **028 7137 0086**. If you have been a victim of crime or abuse in Northern Ireland, there are a range of **other support services, organisations and groups** that can give you free advice and support to help you deal with the impact of a crime.

# Graded Support Ecology:

An evidence informed approach to reducing offending and reoffending

## Why people start offending:

### Deprivation of safety and support:

- Early familial adversity
- Extra familial violence and exploitation
- Economic deprivation and inequalities
- Educational exclusion and life disruption
- Lack of support and early screening

## Why offending persists:

### Deprivation of alternatives and responses:

- Fragmented responses
- Mental health and substance use needs insufficiently met
- Lack of stability
- Overuse of remand
- Long waits for specialist help

From fragmented systems to coordinated prevention

Identification of areas where harm clusters

Community capacity building

Routine screening

Tailored and timely support

**Suppression:** Most complex and highest harm

Multi-agency data sharing and decision making

### Tertiary:

Support for complex and ongoing needs

Criminal justice ownership

### Secondary:

Support for emerging risks

Flexible and responsive community resources

### Universal:

Support for all communities

## Universal Protective Environments

Trust in public bodies

Safe spaces

Inclusion not exclusion

Basic needs met

Belonging

Positive childhood experiences

Social support

## Managing Crime

Focus: Offender risk (criminal justice).

Response: Manage crime downstream.

SHIFT

## Preventing Harm

Focus: Contextual harms (cross-system).

Response: Protective environments and earlier responses to harm upstream.

## Conditions for Crime Prevention

- Academic/ Policy/ Practice Partnerships
- Investment in what works and divestment in what does not
- Test, evaluate and scale
- Multi-agency data collection and sharing
- Cross executive alignment
- Flexible community resources

## Strategic Aims, Themes, Outcomes and Priorities

To inform the structure of the new Strategy, we would welcome your views on adopting two **strategic aims** to guide our development work:

**Aim 1) To reduce offending through prevention and early intervention**, by:

- addressing the underlying drivers of harm; and
- supporting people at the earliest possible stage, before they enter the criminal justice system.

**Aim 2) To reduce reoffending by strengthening deterrence, rehabilitation and resettlement** by supporting those in contact with the criminal justice system to:

- address offending behaviour;
- stabilise their lives; and
- move away from further harm.

These aims are underpinned by a cross-cutting focus on public protection, accountability and the proportionate assessment and management of risk, recognising that behavioural change and risk management are essential to protecting victims, communities and the wider public.

We also welcome your views on four suggested overarching themes and associated outcomes, as a potential starting point for the new strategy. These themes are proposed to reflect evidence that offending and reoffending are influenced by multiple, interconnected economic, health, social and justice system factors, not by single issues in isolation. Work undertaken through the iLab process highlighted the importance of considering a holistic approach that brings together health, community, education, justice and collaborative responses. The themes set out below are intended to support that whole system perspective and to prompt views on whether they provide an appropriate basis for future strategic direction.

We know that health and wellbeing sit at the core of prevention. Poor mental health, substance use, trauma and barriers to accessing timely support are consistently linked to vulnerability, harmful behaviour and reoffending. Strengthening access to health, mental health, wellbeing and crisis prevention services ensures people

receive the support needed to build resilience, stabilise their lives and reduce the risk of escalation.

In terms of community and inclusion, strong, connected and resilient communities reduce opportunities for exploitation and create safer, more supportive environments for change. Evidence across partners highlights the importance of place-based initiatives, positive relationships, local cohesion and inclusive support networks in foster belonging, reducing isolation and breaking cycles of harm. Strengthening these foundations supports early intervention, encourages positive choices and helps people reintegrate successfully.

Increased participation in education and employment can help create pathways away from crime. Sustained engagement in education, skills and employment can help to address offending and reoffending behaviour and open up supported pathways into education and the labour market. Turning to justice and rehabilitation, a fair, effective justice system that supports rehabilitation and accountability is essential to reducing reoffending. Embedding restorative and rehabilitative practices within justice systems promotes accountability and positive change. This theme looks to holding individuals accountable for harmful behaviour, while receiving the structured support needed to change, repair harm and reintegrate safely.

## The proposed new Strategy – at first glance

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**Strategic** A whole-system approach that seeks to address offending across the life

**Aims:** course through two aims:

- 1) **To reduce offending through prevention and early intervention** by:
  - addressing the underlying drivers of harm: and
  - supporting people at the earliest possible stage, before they enter the criminal justice system
- 2) **To reduce reoffending by strengthening deterrence, rehabilitation and resettlement** by supporting those who come into contact with the criminal justice system to:
  - address offending behaviour;
  - stabilise their lives; and
  - move away from further harm.

This includes action across health, education, communities, economy & justice.

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**Vision** A safer, fairer Northern Ireland where opportunity, support and partnership working, prevents harm and reduces offending and reoffending.

Working together to create better life chances and choices

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### Suggested Strategic Themes, Outcomes and Priorities

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#### 1. Health & Wellbeing - Improved health, wellbeing and resilience



- Earlier intervention to address trauma, adversity, mental ill-health and substance use.
  - Support families, children and young people to build lifelong resilience.
  - Integrated, person-centred support for people with complex or multiple needs.
- 

#### 2. Community & Inclusion – Strengthened community support, cohesion and inclusion



- Support safe, stable and inclusive places to live, including secure housing.
  - Increase social connection, particularly for children and young people.
  - Expand trauma-informed, place-based and community-led approaches.
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#### 3. Education & Employability – Increased participation of education and employability opportunities

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- Strengthen inclusive learning and skills pathways from early years through adulthood.
- Create clear, supported routes into training and sustainable employment, including jobs with apprenticeship opportunities.
- Expand access to meaningful learning and career development, in custody and the community.

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#### 4. **Justice & Rehabilitation** – Strengthened restorative and rehabilitative justice and accountability for harmful behaviour



- Embed restorative and rehabilitative approaches across police, courts, custody and community.
- Ensure seamless rehabilitation pathways from sentence to reintegration, including housing, health, family support and employability.
- Modernise justice processes to reduce delay, improve outcomes and reduce harm.

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### Suggested Underpinning Foundation



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#### **Collaboration & Partnership** – Enhanced collaboration across government and our partners, to plan, monitor (data sharing), problem solve, resource and deliver

- Strengthen shared leadership, alignment and accountability across government.
  - Improve data-sharing, insight, joint problem-solving and evidence use.
  - Embed partnership-driven, place-based and community-centred delivery models.
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## Theme and Outcome 1



### Strategic Intent

Improving health and wellbeing is fundamental to reducing offending and reoffending. People who come into contact with the criminal justice system often face profound and interconnected challenges, including childhood adversity, trauma, unmet health, wellbeing and social needs, significantly increasing their vulnerability to harm, justice system involvement and repeat offending. These are not isolated problems but rather symptoms of wider structural and social inequalities.

This theme focuses on a public-health model of prevention and early intervention, holistic and person-centred support where services work together and respond earlier to create better long-term outcomes that strengthen individual, family and community resilience

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### Strategic Priorities

#### **1.1 A public health, prevention-focused approach to addressing the root causes of harm**

This priority anchors the strategy in prevention (including early years), early intervention and whole-system collaboration. It recognises that the pathways into offending are strongly shaped by early adversity, trauma, poverty, mental ill health, substance use and instability.

**Purpose:** Shift systems towards proactive, needs informed and evidence-based intervention, addressing the underlying conditions that contribute to harm, rather than responding only after it occurs.

#### **1.2 Strengthening family, child and youth wellbeing to build lifelong resilience**

This priority places families and young people at the centre of long-term harm reduction, recognising the influence of early relationships, stability and developmental support.

Purpose: Break intergenerational cycles of trauma and disadvantage by investing in supportive environments from pregnancy through early adulthood, ensuring families and children are surrounded by consistent, connected and protective support.

### **1.3 Delivering person-centred, integrated support for people with complex health and social needs**

This priority focuses on the people most at risk of offending or reoffending due to multiple and often complex needs, like mental health challenges, substance use, homelessness, trauma and social isolation.

Purpose: Ensure individuals receive coherent, responsive and continuous support across services and transitions, enabling recovery, stability and improved long-term outcomes.

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## How this theme supports the whole strategy

Health and wellbeing are key aspects of the other themes in the strategy. It is important that issues such as trauma, instability, complex needs and structural disadvantage are addressed as part of the wider effort to prevent or reduce offending. This theme will therefore help enable progress across the other strategic themes, from community resilience to education and employment, to rehabilitation and restorative justice.

By improving health and wellbeing and adopting a public health and prevention-focused approach, the strategy strengthens individual and family stability, reduces risk factors associated with offending and supports safe, resilient communities. In doing so, it enables the ambition for a safer, fairer, more inclusive Northern Ireland.

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## Theme and Outcome 2



**COMMUNITY & INCLUSION**  
Strengthened community support,  
cohesion and inclusion

### Strategic Intent

Strong, connected and inclusive communities are essential to long-term prevention and rehabilitation. When individuals feel part of a cohesive community, supported by stable housing, opportunities for social connection and accessible local services, the likelihood of harmful behaviour reduces significantly. Community resilience is shaped not only by physical environments, but also by trust, belonging, shared identity and collective capacity.

This theme focuses on empowering communities as active partners in reducing harm, while recognising the government's responsibility to address structural inequalities, resource place-based supports and ensure people have access to the conditions that foster safe, healthy and connected lives. It recognises that social exclusion, stigma, poor community connections and lack of belonging can increase vulnerability to harm and justice involvement. Strengthening inclusion and cohesion creates the social foundation for safer neighbourhoods, improved wellbeing and increased opportunities for positive participation. Through partnership working, this helps create conditions for prevention, rehabilitation and sustained desistance.

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### Strategic Priorities

#### **2.1 Enabling safe, stable and inclusive places to live**

A strong community begins with secure, affordable and appropriate housing. Stability in living arrangements underpins wellbeing, strengthens resilience and reduces the vulnerabilities and risks that can lead to offending and reoffending.

**Purpose:** Promote long-term community resilience by ensuring individuals and families have the safety, stability and belonging that comes from secure housing and well supported neighbourhoods.

#### **2.2 Strengthening social connection, belonging and opportunities for children and young people and reducing barriers to exclusion**

Communities are strengthened when people, particularly young people, feel connected, valued and have access to opportunities supporting their development. For example, sport, culture, creativity and youth engagement play a vital role in

preventing isolation, promoting pro-social identity and enhancing collective wellbeing.

Purpose: Build and sustain cohesive and confident communities by increasing positive opportunities for participation, reducing isolation and supporting young people to develop a strong sense of belonging, enabling positive participation for individuals and families.

### **2.3 Embedding trauma-informed, place-based and community-led approaches**

Local, accessible and trusted support reduces barriers, increases engagement and improves outcomes. Trauma-informed, community-centred models ensure services meet people where they are, literally and emotionally and respond to local realities.

Purpose: Create responsive, accessible and locally grounded systems of support that strengthen community wellbeing and build resilience against harm.

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#### How this theme supports the whole strategy

Strengthened community support, cohesion and inclusion are essential conditions for achieving sustained reductions in offending and reoffending. Communities provide the networks, identity and sense of safety that help prevent harmful behaviour and support positive, sustained life outcomes. By investing in place, participation and support systems, this theme reinforces the wider strategy's ambition to tackle root causes, reduce harm and build a safer, fairer and more resilient Northern Ireland.

By promoting inclusive, connected and supportive communities, it helps create the conditions that prevent people from becoming involved in offending and supports those leaving the justice system to reintegrate successfully. It also acts as a key bridge between prevention, wellbeing, rehabilitation and partnership working, ensuring that individuals and families are embedded in supportive communities capable of helping them to build secure and positive futures.

## Theme and Outcome 3

### Strategic Intent



EDUCATION & EMPLOYABILITY  
Increased participation of Education and  
Employment opportunities

Participating in education, skills development and meaningful employment are among the strongest long-term protections against offending and reoffending. For many individuals who are in contact with the justice system, disrupted learning, exclusion, low confidence or limited access to training have shaped their life chances. Addressing these inequalities requires a renewed focus on building supportive, inclusive pathways into education and employment from early childhood through adulthood.

This theme focuses on ensuring that every person, regardless of background, adversity or past justice involvement can access learning, skills development and sustainable work. By removing barriers, widening opportunity and strengthening transitions, the strategy aims to support long-term independence, purpose and stable positive futures.

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### Strategic Priorities

#### **3.1 Strengthening inclusive learning, skills and vocational pathways across the life course**

Education must support engagement, belonging and progression. High-quality, inclusive provision, from early years through school, alternative provision, further and higher education and adult learning to address barriers, increases resilience and reduces patterns of marginalisation that contribute to harm and risk of offending and reoffending.

**Purpose:** Ensure everyone can benefit from supportive, relational and flexible learning, skills and vocational environments that build confidence, raise attainment and enable long-term- progression.

#### **3.2 Creating clear, supported routes into skills, training and sustainable employment**

Access to accredited skills, apprenticeships and fair employment opportunities supports long-term independence and desistance. Removing practical and systemic barriers, including those faced by people with a criminal record or individuals leaving custody, through cross-sector coordinated support, is essential to building stable futures. This ensures the right guidance, skills development and practical assistance

is provided at the right time.

Purpose: Strengthen participation in work and skills and training/career pathways by connecting people to opportunities, reducing barriers and supporting successful entry into sustainable employment.

### **3.3 Expanding access to meaningful learning, skills development and career pathways**

People build confidence and capability when they have opportunities to learn, grow and progress in ways that reflect their strengths, interests and aspirations.

Expanding access to high-quality learning, skills development and career pathway including vocational training, apprenticeships, mentoring and industry-linked programmes helps individuals build confidence, purpose and the capabilities needed for long-term stability. Consistent access to these opportunities, in both custody and the community, supports people to reconnect with positive identities and make sustainable transitions into work.

Purpose: Empower individuals to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to build stable futures and participate fully in economic and community life.

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## How this theme supports the whole strategy

Participating in education and employment plays a central role in reducing offending and reoffending by addressing structural inequalities, improving life chances and building positive futures. Increased participation in learning and employment strengthens individual resilience, reduces vulnerability and improves community safety.

By prioritising capability, confidence and opportunity, this theme reinforces the wider strategy's ambition to tackle root causes of harm, strengthen stability, support independence and build a fairer, more resilient Northern Ireland.

## Theme and Outcome 4 Strategic Intent



**JUSTICE & REHABILITATION**  
Strengthened restorative and  
rehabilitative justice and accountability  
for harmful behaviour

A justice system that is restorative, rehabilitative and proportionate is essential to building safer communities. People are more likely to change their behaviour when they understand the impact of their actions, are supported to take responsibility and can access meaningful help to rebuild their lives. At the same time, victims and communities need responses that repair harm and promote accountability.

This theme focuses on early intervention, tailored rehabilitation and modernised justice processes that support long-term change. By connecting justice with, for example, health, education, housing and community supports, the system becomes more effective, responsive and outcome focused.

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### Strategic Priorities

#### **4.1 Embedding restorative and rehabilitative approaches across justice pathways**

Restorative and rehabilitative approaches allow individuals to understand the harm caused, make amends and engage with processes that promote personal growth and responsibility. Embedding and expanding these approaches across police, courts, custody and community justice services ensures that people are supported to reflect, repair relationships and build insight into their behaviour. This includes widening access to restorative dialogue, problem-solving models, victim aware interventions and trauma-informed practices that improve outcomes.

**Purpose:** Strengthen accountability while supporting constructive behaviour change that reduces harm and increases safety.

#### **4.2 Creating seamless rehabilitation pathways from sentence through reintegration**

Effective rehabilitation requires coordinated, continuous support from the earliest point of contact through to return to the community. This means ensuring individuals have access to stable housing, mental and physical healthcare, substance use support, education, employability services and family or community connections throughout their justice engagement. Clear roles, shared planning and strong transition arrangements ‘through the gate’ minimise disruption and prevent setbacks

at critical points. Strengthening these pathways ensures people leave custody or supervision better prepared, better supported and more able to lead stable lives.

Purpose: Enable safe, stable reintegration through coordinated, wraparound support across and beyond the justice system.

### **4.3 Modernising justice processes to improve outcomes and reduce harm**

Modernising justice processes means ensuring that responses to harmful behaviour are fair, proportionate and informed by evidence about what works. This includes reducing unnecessary delay, improving consistency in decision-making and expanding community-based interventions that address the underlying causes of offending more effectively than short custodial sentences. It also requires rethinking how the system responds to people whose primary needs relate to mental health, neurodiversity/learning disability or substance use, ensuring they are directed to the right support rather than being unnecessarily drawn deeper into the criminal justice system. A modernised justice system is more accessible, trauma-informed and better equipped to deliver outcomes supporting individuals, victims and communities.

Purpose: Build a fair, effective and trauma-informed justice system that delivers better long-term- outcomes.

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## How this theme supports the whole strategy

Justice and rehabilitation have a pivotal role in achieving the strategy's wider ambitions by ensuring that responses to harmful behaviour are constructive, proportionate and focused on long-term safety. By strengthening rehabilitation, promoting restoration and modernising justice processes, this theme seeks to reduce reoffending and help prevent further harm to individuals, victims and communities.

It also connects closely with the other themes by ensuring that people in the criminal justice system can access the health, housing, employment, education and community supports they need to rebuild their lives. In doing so, it reinforces a whole-system approach in which accountability is matched with meaningful support, enabling more people to change course, reintegrate successfully and contribute positively to safer, stronger and more resilient communities.

## Underpinning Foundation



### Strategic Intent

Reducing offending and reoffending is a whole-system challenge requiring shared leadership, aligned priorities and resources, integrated governance and coordinated delivery. People's needs span departments and sectors and no single organisation can meet them in isolation.

This underpinning foundation provides a common thread across the strategy, reflecting a shift towards stronger whole of government alignment, improved data-sharing, joint problem-solving and partnership-driven delivery models that ensure services are consistent, coherent and easy to navigate. In a constrained financial context, stronger collaboration and partnership working is essential to reduce duplication, share capacity and ensure that limited resources are directed towards interventions that deliver the greatest collective benefit.

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### Strategic Foundation

#### **Strengthening system-wide alignment and shared leadership and accountability**

Effective collaboration begins with a shared direction of travel. Strengthening alignment across departments, agencies, councils and the voluntary and community sector ensures that all partners work toward common goals and priorities with clear roles, responsibilities, coordinated planning and joined-up governance and resourcing. Shared leadership and accountability enable consistent decision-making, reduces duplication and helps us act collectively rather than in silos, particularly when responding to complex or cross-cutting needs.

**Purpose:** Ensure coherent, collective leadership and accountability that brings partners together around common outcomes and drives coordinated and integrated action.

### **Improving data-sharing, evidence use and joint problem-solving**

Strong partnerships rely on access to timely, high-quality information. Improving and enabling timely, lawful and proportionate data-sharing and evidence use enables partners to identify- emerging needs, risks, track progress and impact, target resources and learn quickly across organisations. Joint problem-solving creates space for partners to examine challenges together, test new approaches and align interventions in ways that are responsive and impactful.

Purpose: Enable informed, coordinated decision-making- and action that strengthens performance, transparency and accountability and improves outcomes.

### **Embedding partnership-driven, place-based delivery models**

Place-based approaches ensure that services reflect local realities and are shaped by those who know communities best, including councils, local service providers and voluntary and community organisations. This supports local and regional partnerships to identify challenges, test solutions and respond flexibly to emerging issues, drawing on community, voluntary and statutory expertise. Working in partnership at a local level also strengthens relationships, builds trust and brings services closer to where people live. Co-located or integrated delivery models reduce barriers to access and support individuals to navigate the system more easily, fostering stronger outcomes and more resilient communities.

Purpose: Deliver joined-up, community-centred support that increases reach, equity and long-term impact.

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## How this supports the whole strategy

Collaboration and Partnership is the foundation that enables the four proposed key themes in the strategy to work effectively as the potential drivers of offending and reoffending span health, education, housing, social care, community development and justice. Progress depends on a system where departments and partners work in alignment rather than in isolation. By strengthening shared leadership, improving coordination and embedding joint accountability, this pillar ensures that collective effort is focused, coherent and capable of delivering meaningful change. It also helps to align priorities, resources and delivery across the four strategic themes by enabling earlier identification of need, more effective problem-solving and clearer insight into what works, supporting continuous improvement and better outcomes for individuals, victims and communities.

Stronger collaboration also ensures that individuals experience a cohesive, well-connected pathway of support, instead of facing the potential confusion and inefficiency of disconnected or duplicated services. When organisations plan together, share insight and deliver in an integrated way, interventions become more responsive, preventative and sustainable. By aligning expertise, assets and funding, partners can respond more flexibly to emerging challenges, invest in preventative and early intervention approaches and maximise collective impact in reducing reoffending and improving public safety. In this way, collaboration and partnership acts as the backbone of the new strategy, enabling prevention, strengthening rehabilitation, supporting reintegration and ultimately contributing to a safer, fairer and more resilient Northern Ireland.

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## How to respond

We want to hear from you. Whether you are responding as an individual, on behalf of an organisation, or as someone with direct experience of these issues, your views and evidence are vital to shaping the new strategy.

We would encourage participants to provide feedback via our online Citizen Space questionnaire which is available [here](#).

(<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/doj/reducing-offending-and-reoffending-call-for-views>)

Should you have any queries you can contact the Department of Justice Reducing Offending and Reoffending Strategy Team by email at [doj.rors@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:doj.rors@justice-ni.gov.uk) or by post at:

Reducing Offending and Reoffending Strategy Team

Department of Justice

Room A4.16, Block A, 4th Floor

Castle Buildings

Stormont Estate

BELFAST

BT4 3SQ

Telephone: 028 9052 5166

This Call for Views will be open for 8 weeks. The closing date for submitting your views is 13<sup>th</sup> August 2026.

## Alternative formats

If you need this document in an alternative format or language other than English, or wish to respond using an alternative format, please contact [doj.rors@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:doj.rors@justice-ni.gov.uk) for assistance.

A child friendly and Easy Read version of this Call for Views will also be available on the [DoJ site](#).

## Privacy, Confidentiality and Data Protection

To be as transparent as possible, we may publish responses to this Call for Views in our Summary of Responses paper when released, except where respondents indicate they are acting in a private capacity. Responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published in anonymised form. For more information on how we handle personal data please see the separate privacy notice.

For this reason, in the online Call for Views, we ask for your name, email address and about the organisation you represent, however, please do not provide any other personal or identifying information. Any personal information or information that would identify you or others, if provided, will be removed from the published responses, as will any inappropriate or offensive comments.

Information provided may be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). Any disclosure will be considered in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679. Subject to certain limited provisos, the FOIA gives members of the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case, the Department of Justice. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a Call for Views.

If you would prefer for your response not to be published, again, please indicate this through the relevant questions in the Call for Views. If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain why you regard it as confidential, so this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOI or EIR.

## APPENDIX A (FOR INFORMATION ONLY– RESPONSES SHOULD BE SUBMITTED ON [CITIZEN SPACE \(opens in a new window\)](#))

### Call for Views – Citizen Space Questions

#### Reducing Offending and Reoffending Strategy

#### SECTION 1: About You

##### 1) Are you responding as:

- A member of the public  
[Please **do not provide your name or email address**].
- Someone with lived experience of offending or reoffending, or at risk of this  
[Please **do not provide your name or email address**].
- Someone with lived experience as a victim of offending or reoffending  
[Please **do not provide your name or email address**]
- Someone with worked or professional experience with people offending or reoffending (or at risk of this)
- Someone with worked or professional experience supporting victims of crime
- A community or voluntary organisation
- A public-sector organisation
- An academic or researcher
- Other (please specify)

2) If responding on behalf of an organisation, please provide its name and an email address.

## SECTION 2: Understanding Offending, Reoffending and Harm

3a)

**Which of the following factors do you consider contribute to, or increase the risk of, offending in Northern Ireland today?**

**(Please select all that apply.)'**

- Health and mental wellbeing difficulties
- Housing insecurity or homelessness
- Poor engagement with education, including persistent absence or risk of exclusion
- Unemployment, insecure work or lack of training opportunities
- Trauma or adverse childhood experiences
- Substance use (drugs / alcohol)
- Poverty or financial stress
- Social isolation or lack of positive support
- Inter-generational experiences of offending (long-standing family or community patterns of involvement with the justice system) Community-level safety issues (e.g. persistent disorder, intimidation, violence)
- Peer influence or harmful social networks
- Exposure to domestic abuse or coercive control
- Barriers to accessing timely and effective support services
- Other (please specify)

**3b) Based on the factors selected in 3a, which do you believe is the MAIN factor contributing to offending in Northern Ireland today.**

**(Please choose one)**

- Health and mental wellbeing difficulties
- Housing insecurity or homelessness
- Poor engagement with education, including persistent absence or risk of exclusion
- Unemployment, insecure work or lack of training opportunities
- Trauma or adverse childhood experiences

- Substance use (drugs / alcohol)
- Poverty or financial stress
- Social isolation or lack of positive support
- Inter-generational experiences of offending (long-standing family or community patterns of involvement with the justice system) Community-level safety issues (e.g. persistent disorder, intimidation, violence)
- Peer influence or harmful social networks
- Exposure to domestic abuse or coercive control
- Barriers to accessing timely and effective support services

**3c) Please provide examples / references / evidence links (from Northern Ireland or elsewhere) or through lived experience that supports your views in 3a & 3b**

**4a) Do you think the underlying causes, or risk, of first-time reoffending are different from the causes of reoffending?**

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No
- Unsure

**4b) Please provide examples / references / evidence links from Northern Ireland or elsewhere or lived experience.**

### **SECTION 3: Preventing First-Time Offending**

**5a) In your experience, which approaches, support or services do you believe help prevent children, young people and adults coming into contact with, or entering, the criminal justice system for the first time?**

- Access to safe and secure housing
- Mental health or wellbeing support
- Support with substance use
- Employment, skills or training opportunities (including supported employment)
- Positive relationships, supportive adult relationships and role models
- Addressing harmful peer influence, coercion or exploitation
- Early identification of additional support needs (including learning, communication, cognitive or neurodiversity needs)
- Diversionary approaches with adults (e.g. informal warnings, restorative approaches to address harm caused, alternatives to prosecution)
- Targeted youth justice interventions, including early-stage diversion
- Early help for families
- Access to appropriate support within school or alternative education provision
- Access to structured post-school pathways, including education, training or supported employment for young people with additional or special educational needs (SEN)
- Access to youth or community programmes
- Other (please specify)

**5b) Please provide examples / references / evidence links from Northern Ireland or elsewhere / lived experience that supports your views in 5a.**

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## **SECTION 4: Reducing Reoffending**

**6a) Which types of support or services do you think help people to stop reoffending?**

- Health and wellbeing support
- Substance use treatment
- Safe and secure housing
- Education, skills or employment support
- Family or community support
- Youth justice interventions, including restorative practice
- Problem-solving approaches for adults, including restorative justice
- Structured supervision and case management
- Accredited or offence-specific programmes
- Risk assessment and management interventions
- Victim awareness or relationship based interventions
- Support during key transitions (e.g. leaving custody)
- Communication-accessible support and reasonable adjustments
- Other (please specify)

**6b) Please provide examples / references / evidence links from Northern Ireland or elsewhere that supports your views in 6a.**

**7a) Are there particular groups who may need specific tailored support or prioritisation to reduce reoffending?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**7b) if your answer to 7a is yes, please tell us which groups and explain why tailored support or prioritisation may be needed. You may wish to consider a**

range of factors, such as differences related to age, gender, type of offence, level of need (including Special Educational Needs or neurodiversity), or key transition points (such as moving from school to work, from youth to adult services, or leaving custody). Please provide examples / references / evidence links from Northern Ireland or elsewhere / lived experience that supports your views in question 7a.

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### **SECTION 5: Reducing Harm**

Early help, prevention, intervention and community-based support are all about helping people as early as possible, before problems get worse. Early help means offering support at the first signs of difficulty. Prevention aims to stop problems from happening in the first place. Intervention means providing support when problems have already started. Community-based support includes local services and groups that help people feel supported and connected.

Reducing harm and vulnerability means making sure people are safer and less at risk of problems like abuse, poor health, or getting into trouble. It also means helping people build strong support networks so they can cope better with challenges.

**8a) What types of early help, prevention, intervention or community-based support do you believe are most effective in reducing harm and vulnerability?**

**8b) Please provide examples / references / evidence links from Northern Ireland or elsewhere or lived experience that supports your views in 8a.**

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### **SECTION 6: Structure, Measuring Success and Delivering Change**

In terms of the new reducing offending and reoffending strategy, do you agree with the suggested:

**9a) Strategic Aim 1 - To reduce offending through prevention and early intervention, by:**

- addressing the underlying drivers of harm, and
- supporting people at the earliest possible stage, before they enter the criminal justice system.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**9b) Strategic Aim 2 - To reduce reoffending by strengthening deterrence, rehabilitation and resettlement** by supporting those who come into contact with the criminal justice system to:

- address offending behaviour,
- stabilise their lives, and
- move away from further harm.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**9c) Strategic Vision:**

A safer, fairer Northern Ireland where opportunity, support and partnership working, prevents harm and reduces offending and reoffending.

Working together to create better life chances and choices

A strategic vision sets out what we want to achieve to make things better to make better in the future and what changes will help us do that.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**9d) Themes, outcomes and priorities:**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**9e) Please provide any further comments or evidence in relation to your response to questions 9a, 9b, 9c and 9d.**

**10a) Which outcomes should we prioritise in the new Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending in Northern Ireland?**

- Fewer first-time offences
- Reduced reoffending
- Reduced harm to victims and communities
- Increased support for families
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Improved identification and support for neurodiversity
- Improved education and employment outcomes
- Stronger community support, cohesion and inclusion
- Increased public confidence
- Other (please specify)

**10b) Are there any other outcomes this strategy should consider including?**

**10c) What should success look like in terms of the outcomes and associated measures for the new strategy. Please provide references / links to evidence from Northern Ireland or elsewhere that supports your views in 10a & 10b**

**11) How can government, communities and the voluntary sector work better together to reduce offending and reoffending and deliver change?**

**12) How best can we meet the needs of specific Section 75 groups and individuals in rural communities, and reduce barriers to support and access to services, in reducing offending and reoffending and the risk of this?**

(Section 75 groups include: people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group; men and women generally; people of different age, marital status or sexual orientation, people with and without a disability; and people with and without dependants:).

**Please provide examples / references / evidence links from Northern Ireland or elsewhere / lived experience that supports your views in 8a.**

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## **SECTION 7: Final Reflections**

**13. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that should inform the new strategy (including reducing harm and vulnerability)?**