

Working together for
fairness, justice and safety

Restoring Relationships, Redressing Harm

ADULT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE STRATEGY

FOURTH ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT – 2025/26

31 July 2026



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Mánnystrie O tha Laa

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Department of Justice continues to work with statutory, voluntary and community sector partners to fulfil its long-term commitment to embed restorative justice as a key principle within the adult criminal justice system.

The Strategy, accompanied by a five-year Action Plan, sets out key objectives the Department and members of the multi-agency Restorative Justice Working Group have identified as being crucial to the successful implementation of restorative justice throughout the criminal justice system. The Action Plan is divided into three distinct, but interrelated, parts:

- 1) Overarching themes – The major themes and issues highlighted in the Strategy.
- 2) Options for delivering restorative justice at different stages of the criminal justice continuum.
- 3) Delivery on recommendations made in a number of independent reviews.

Several key actions were identified within each theme to deliver and report on during each year of the Action Plan. These are kept under review and updated annually as work is completed or priorities change. Progress on the implementation of the Strategy, and delivery against the Action Plan, is monitored by the Restorative Justice Working Group. This work is also reflected in the Department's Annual Business Plan.

This document is the fourth annual progress report to be published and provides information on the work that has taken place from April 2025 to March 2026. The following sections mirror the three distinct parts of the Action Plan and sets out the progress made against the actions within each.

2. ACTION PLAN PART 1: OVERARCHING THEMES

Part 1 of the Action Plan relates to a number of overarching themes which are crucial to the expansion and delivery of quality restorative justice services and provide a framework and context within which our work takes place. In total, **four overarching themes** were identified through consultation and discussion.

(i) A Victim-Centred Approach

A key aspect of the strategy is to ensure that there is a victim-centred focus. Through the use of restorative justice we can better meet the needs of victims of crime, provide redress for the harm caused and find an effective alternative to punitive responses. Many of the actions from this theme were completed in Years 1, 2 and 3 of the Strategy, with Restorative Justice Working Group (RJWG) members continuing to deliver on the remaining actions.

Progress update:

Engagement with victims and victim organisations.	The Department, Protocol Lead and members of the RJWG have continued to progress this action in Year 4, including but not limited to the work below: • The Protocol Lead met with the Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate, Geri Hanna, regarding the centrality of victims in the new diversionary restorative justice disposal process. The Commissioner also took part in a video that formed part of the online training for PSNI ahead of introduction of the new approach. This was also made available to accredited practitioners. • The Protocol Lead continued to work with Probation Officers in PBNI's Victim Information Unit on restorative justice cases that have come forward. • A victim was involved in the development of an animation to raise awareness of what restorative justice entails, as well as an offender. • A roundtable discussion was held with statutory and voluntary sector partners in January 2026 to seek views on how a restorative process could work for victims of domestic and sexual abuse offences that is inclusive, effective and safe. This was facilitated by Dr Marie Keenan and attended by statutory and voluntary sector organisations. This involved a victim of sexual violence setting out her experience of the restorative justice
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	process. Given that there remains some concern around the use of this approach, in these sensitive cases, it has been agreed that they will not be included within the current arrangements at this time. Collaboration with partners will continue until we are content that we can offer a restorative process that all can agree to. This will likely only be brought forward at the end of the current diversionary disposal pilot. • In the last year, Community Restorative Justice Ireland has worked with around 2,300 participants providing support and helping them to engage in meaningful restorative interventions in over 1,200 cases. • In the last year, NIA has worked with around 1,800 victims providing wraparound support and engagement in restorative processes in 1,000 cases. NIA has also signposted participants to organisations such as Women's Aid, Victim Support, CRJI, Simon Community, Housing Executive, PSNI and other organisations which assist in a wraparound response.
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(ii) Capacity Building and Effective Delivery of Restorative Justice

One of the key objectives highlighted in the Strategy was to extend the reach of restorative justice, both in terms of geographical location and in the range of its use across the justice continuum.

The work of the Restorative Justice Protocol Lead, the development and implementation of the new accreditation process, for organisations and individuals, has been key to facilitating the implementation of the revised Restorative Justice Protocol and work to expand the network of accredited Restorative Justice practitioners and the geographical spread of service provision.

Following the roll out of the new accreditation process seven organisations are now accredited across Northern Ireland – Community Restorative Justice Ireland, Community Restorative Justice Derry, Community Restorative Justice Newry Armagh, Northern Ireland Alternatives, Prison Fellowship, Tides and Victim Support. In addition, 14 organisational practitioners are now accredited at Level 2 and 3, with six organisational practitioners accredited at Level 1. These practitioners are spread across the seven organisations, with two independent practitioners at Level 2 and 3. In total there are 16 practitioners in the Restorative Hub, which will deal with formal criminal justice referrals and six practitioners at Level 1. Going forward the Department

will review how we engage with the accredited organisations and practitioners to ensure that the new process is as effective as possible. Together this will help us to ensure that this work is not completed in isolation of the community context, which is particularly important given that crime disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities.

This work is also helping is to ensure that there will be a consistent geographical and standardised provision of restorative justice services across Northern Ireland, by accredited practitioners, where this involves criminal justice system engagement, along with effective referral mechanisms for criminal justice partners and other organisations.

Many of the actions under this heading have been completed, including the promotion of the revised Protocol, the formal launch of the [Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework](#) and the commencement and promotion of the new accreditation process. The original Protocol Lead left her post at the end of March, with Donna Murray (who has extensive experience of working in youth restorative justice conferences) having taken up this post.

With the introduction of the newly accredited practitioners a new action identified for Year 5 is to review and monitor the operation of the new diversionary disposal (including training), consider any changes that may be required, with a view to considering how best we can move into the court process after the review of the 18-month diversionary restorative justice pilot. Progress is set out below.

Progress update:

Provision of support – including financial support – to accredited organisations/individuals to assist with capacity building, training and the delivery of effective Community Based Restorative Justice schemes.	This action is ongoing. A funding options paper was considered by the Restorative Justice Working Group. It was agreed that for the purposes of the first year of the new diversionary disposal that a set amount of funding would be provided to accredited organisations (and independent practitioners) for each Level 2 and Level 3 practitioner operating in the new Restorative Hub. The learning from year one will allow the Department to review the funding approach and consider the nature and effectiveness of the funding model in future years.
Agree a standardised schedule and programme of inspection with CJINI	The new Protocol changes CJINI's role in the accreditation process. Department officials met with CJINI to discuss the new arrangements, with it agreed that it is more appropriate that CJINI undertake inspections and assess the work of accredited organisations and practitioners after the new system is

	operational, rather than as the ‘last hurdle’ before accreditation (given that the assurance should be provided through the robustness of the new process). Both the Department and CJINI are of the view that the accreditation process must be sufficiently robust and comprehensive to provide sufficient evidence and assurance on which to determine accreditation, which is what we consider the new process secures. CJINI have advised that they should not be seen as the ‘last hurdle’ before accreditation, the barrier to it or the decision maker. It is hoped that an initial inspection could potentially commence during the second half of the three-year accreditation period and that this could be followed up during the second period of accreditation. This reflects that CJINI have limited resources, which need to be targeted appropriately on a risk-based approach.
Promotion of revised Protocol & associated accreditation arrangements to wider groups engaged in restorative work, with the aim of encouraging accreditation.	This action is now considered complete, with the work that has been undertaken to promote the new accreditation process, and a new action included focusing on promoting the range of forthcoming work.
Formal launch of Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework, with associated promotion.	This action is now considered complete. The new Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework was published on 17 October 2025. A formal launch event took place in the Pavillion, Stormont Estate, which was attended by a range of Departmental, statutory and voluntary sector partners as well as CJINI. The Framework was published on the DoJ website alongside a press release from the Justice Minister. Physical copies of the Framework have been printed and shared with organisations and practitioners. Work has continued to promote the introduction of the new diversionary disposals with partners and across social media.
New accreditation process for	This action is now considered complete. The new accreditation application process was launched on 17

organisations and individuals commenced and promoted	October 2025, alongside publication of the Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework, and closed on 5 December 2025. A range of organisations, organisational practitioners and independent practitioners submitted applications which underwent a robust review process by the Protocol Lead and an independent suitability panel. Recommendations on accreditation were then reviewed, and signed off, by a senior departmental official and the Justice Minister advised on the outcome. The new diversionary disposal was launched in Lisburn & Castlereagh and Ards and North Down at the end of March 2026.
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(iii) Legislative Issues

The initial focus of the new RJ process introduced in early 2026 is on cases that can be diverted and therefore prevented from going to court. This will not require legislative change.

Those in favour of a statutory basis for restorative interventions see this as a driver for mainstreaming the use of restorative justice, as well as a commitment to its use. As part of the work to fully integrate RJ into the justice continuum further consideration will be given to the need for a legislative underpinning.

The Strategy identified two further issues under this overarching theme of legislation: the need to deliver any legislative change arising from the new [2023 Protocol](#) and the need to regularise an existing anomaly relating to the transfer of accreditation legislation from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Department. The latter has been delivered with the amendments being made to the Justice Bill, which is currently progressing through the Assembly, superseding the administrative arrangements that are currently in place.

Progress update:

Establish and agree the need for, and extent of, formal statutory provision required to deliver adult restorative justice on a diversionary basis	Work focused on the development of a diversionary restorative justice pilot, which does not require legislative change at this point. Any lessons learnt from the pilot will help to inform the need for legislation in the future.
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or as part of a post-conviction disposal.	The work being taken forward has also provided an opportunity to include legislative provisions which reflect the accreditation requirements in the new 2023 Protocol.
Regularise existing legislative provision governing accreditation through a transfer of functions from NIO to DoJ Ministers.	The new restorative justice legislative provisions are contained in the Justice Bill, which was introduced into the Assembly on 17 September 2025. Second stage was completed on 1 October 2025, followed by Committee stage on 26 March 2026 and Further Consideration Stage in June 2026. The Bill is expected to secure Royal Assent in early 2027. Following this a commencement order will be brought forward to formally introduce the new legislative provisions. As part of this process the Department provided a range of writing and oral briefing to the Justice Committee, to address a wide range of queries. The provisions, which were tabled as an amendment following introduction of the Justice Bill, were formally incorporated into it at Consideration Stage, in June 2026.

(iv) Communication and Engagement

The fourth and final overarching theme in the Action Plan was the need for effective communication and engagement across all sectors, and with the public in particular, to promote the understanding and use of restorative justice as an agreed alternative to, or an integral part of, the formal justice system.

Delivery partners have continued to promote a consistent supportive message about RJ to their service users and to the wider public. Previously there may have been a risk of raising too much awareness before there was capacity to ensure services were available, but with the new accreditation process undertaken and DoJ accredited practitioners ready to be allocated cases, it is now the right time to make everyone aware of RJ as an option.

Progress update:

Raise awareness of restorative justice through:	These actions are ongoing. Reducing Offending Division and key stakeholders, remain aware of the need for staff to be adequately trained, standards to be established and processes to be put in place before public awareness raising of RJ will increase the demand for services.
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Development of a public awareness approach to inform and educate people, including the rationale behind it and the potential for positive outcomes. A co-ordinated approach across all statutory and community / voluntary sector organisations on key messages. Promotion of relevant RJ projects and celebration of successes.	A social media awareness campaign was launched in the weeks ahead of go live of the diversionary restorative justice pilot on 30 March 2026. A series of videos, quotes and facts about restorative justice were published on the Department's social media account and shared by partner organisations. Several pieces of promotional material have also been developed over the last year, including Restorative Justice information and preparation leaflets for both victims and perpetrators that will be involved in the restorative justice conferencing process. In addition, a short, animated video was produced by a professional studio that explains what restorative justice is and the potential benefits. The launch of the new Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework and accompanying accreditation process were also promoted via Department social media accounts and press releases and highlighted by partner organisations. A range of awareness raising/information/training sessions have been completed with statutory partners within PSNI, PPS and PBNI. In-person training for nominated Restorative Justice champions in PSNI, PBNI, and prosecutors who will be assessing recommendations for diversionary restorative justice across the initial areas, took place in February 2026. The aim was to raise awareness and promote the use of restorative justice. This was supplemented by PSNI-wide online training in both districts. An initial information session on the new arrangements was held with PCSP Managers in November and December 2025, with further sessions were offered to PCSP and Policing Board members. The Law Society were also briefed in November 2025 on the new arrangements. Follow up discussions with Legal Aid Policy colleagues were also held. Judicial Studies Board colleagues were also briefed on the new restorative justice arrangements at a Judicial Studies "Away Day" in early 2026. An awareness raising session with MLA's was held in February 2026 to promote a better understanding of RJ and
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	its benefits within the Assembly, as part of the Assembly's Parliamentary Excellence Programme.
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3. ACTION PLAN PART 2: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AS PART OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTINUUM

Part 2 of the Action Plan focuses on expanding and increasing the use of RJ approaches across the criminal justice system continuum. In addition, it considers how RJ providers across a range of sectors can work together to repair harm caused by offenders and meet the needs of victims of crime and the community at all stages.

In progressing restorative justice interventions, it is important that the response to incidents is constructive and addresses issues in a way that is both restorative but also complements any formal proceedings and doing so improve the outcomes for all involved.

Progress update:

Pilot new adult restorative justice process for low-level offending as part of Community Resolution Notices.	The CRN Restorative Justice Pilot did not meet its intended outcomes during the initial implementation phase. While it provided important learning, further development is needed before wider implementation across Northern Ireland. The initiative will be reconsidered as part of the ongoing wider restorative justice developments. For now, given that the focus will remain on the new diversionary disposal pilot, this action will likely be on hold until the completion of that pilot.
Explore potential and capacity for the use of restorative interventions to divert adults from formal criminal proceedings, taking account of best practice from appropriate alternative models.	A Restorative Justice diversionary disposal pilot went live in the initial locations of Ards & North Down and Lisburn & Castlereagh on 30 March 2026. This will be followed by other districts on a phased basis to manage referral numbers and ensure a high level of service delivery. As part of this work restorative justice conferences will be undertaken by the newly accredited practitioners within the Restorative Hub. These practitioners attended a 6-day training course on the new conferencing process and its outworkings. They also participated in a report writing skills half day with the new Independent Referral Body (led

	by PBNI). In addition, a day's training has been undertaken with Level one practitioners. The RJ Task and Finish group has been heavily engaged in developing the operational side of the pilot, with a significant amount of work progressed to ensure the necessary training is undertaken and processes put in place to make the new process as effective as possible.
Explore the potential for victim initiated restorative diversion as an alternative to prosecution for low level offending, giving victims a choice of a traditional PPS-led process or early restorative engagement with the offender.	This work will be considered as part of the work being taken forward in the actions above, but will be dependent on a successful pilot phase, with the learning taken from it to inform how victims are/can be involved to a greater extent.
Explore opportunities for the formal/informal inclusion of restorative justice in community sentences, in line with recommendations of the Sentencing Policy Review.	The initial focus of the Department is on the diversionary pilot, with a view that the lessons from this will inform the eventual expansion to include cases as they progress through the formal court-based system in a separate phase.
Consider the development of a pilot Restorative Justice court as part of the Department's wider Problem-Solving Justice approach.	The initial focus of the Department is on the diversionary pilot, with a view that the lessons from this will inform the eventual expansion to include cases as they progress through the formal court-based system in a separate phase. Work in relation to the use of RJ as part of a court order will be taken forward under future phases of the RJ pilot.
Continued expansion of reparative and restorative work in delivery of current PBNI orders (ECOs, Community Service etc.) both within the community and in custody	The last action on this matter was in relation to the continued expansion of reparative and restorative work in the delivery of current PBNI orders (ECOs, community service etc.) both within the community and in custody. This work is ongoing and is considered to be business as usual with the community sentences. PBNI also continues to participate in the NIPS steering group to contribute to the

	development, and assist in the implementation, of restorative practice in a custodial sentence. ECOs are available in three court areas, which equates to approximately 40% availability across all courts. Any further expansion will remain subject to funding.
Implement the use of restorative practice to respond to situations with people in custody and support harm reduction, through: • Development and implementation of a restorative practice framework, in partnership with QUB; and • Learning interventions and operational procedures to support prison staff.	The NIPS Restorative Practice Steering Group continued to meet on a regular basis, with a view to developing an operationally focused delivery plan. As part of this a range of prison colleagues undertook restorative practice training arranged by the Protocol Lead.
Identify and implement opportunities to grow the use of restorative interventions throughout NIPS, as part of (but not limited to): • Prisoner Development Plans; • licence conditions; • help to repair relationships between prisoners and their families, victims and communities prior to release from custody; or • Conditional Early Release Schemes.	As above. Personnel from HMP Peterborough attended a meeting with a workshop held to discuss the delivery plan. Progress has been impacted by capacity issues within the establishments as a result of increasing prison population pressures across all three establishments.

4. ACTION PLAN PART 3: RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER JUSTICE REVIEWS

Part 3 of the Action Plan relates to work that was undertaken through three key reviews, considering hate crime (Marrinan Review), serious sexual offences (Gillen Review) and a Centre of Restorative Excellence. A common factor is the potential use of restorative justice in the delivery of change in the criminal justice system. An update in relation to these areas is set out below.

(i) Hate Crime

Judge Desmond Marrinan's report, published in December 2020, contained a dedicated chapter on restorative justice (Chapter 11) and the opportunities for its use in addressing hate crime and providing support for victims. It included seven recommendations on how and when restorative justice might be used for instances of hate crime, and what the governing architecture surrounding its use might be, including a statutory framework for hate crime to be dealt with restoratively via both diversionary and formal court schemes.

Progress update:

Consider implementation of restorative justice recommendations published in Marrinan review, including developing opportunities for using a diversionary scheme for low-level hate crimes and need for a wider adult RJ statutory scheme	Members of the RJWG agreed the PSNI expansion of CRN criteria to include hate crime would be a suitable tool to deal with such crimes. However, the CRN Restorative Justice Pilot did not meet its intended outcomes during the initial implementation phase. While it provided important learning, further development is needed before wider implementation across Northern Ireland. The initiative will be reconsidered as part of the ongoing wider restorative justice developments. While PBNi have also attempted to prioritise the use of restorative justice for offences of hate crime, in line with the RJ strategy, the numbers of service users subject to probation supervision for offences motivated by hate remains low. A Restorative Justice pilot with a focus on diversionary cases went live on 30 March 2026. This could include low level hate crimes.
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(ii) Serious Sexual Offences

The Gillen Review focused on the laws and procedures in serious sexual offence cases in Northern Ireland and included two recommendations for consideration in relation to the use of victim-led RJ as (i) an additional support for, and (ii) an alternative to, the formal criminal justice system.

Given that the more recent focus has been on the development of a diversionary restorative justice approach there is no material update in relation to this action. However, the work that has been progressed will be relevant in relation to a wide number of cases and less serious or complex incidents may be included in the initial diversionary pilot.

Progress update:

In partnership with statutory and third sector organisations, consider recommendations published in Gillen review relating to the use of restorative justice for serious sexual offences.	Reducing Offending Division officials have continued to meet with the Gillen Review Implementation Team and PhD student Kirsten McGregor to get updates on their work. Kirsten advised that although she has written up and submitted her findings, further work is needed before her final report can be shared with the Department.
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(iii) A Centre of Restorative Excellence (CORE)

The proposal to develop a Centre of Restorative Excellence, or CORE, was contained in the 2016 Fresh Start Panel's report on the disbandment of paramilitary groups and was also the subject of one of Judge Marrinan's recommendations on restorative justice.

Recommendation A9 recommended that the Executive should put in place a dedicated, long-term fund for restorative justice, and that it should be used to resource a CORE for Northern Ireland. While this has not yet been actioned officials have recently re-engaged with the Executive Office to restart the conversation in relation to this issue.

In addition, the Protocol Lead has worked to progress actions that are within the Department's gift, as set out below.

Progress update:

Work with Executive Departments on the delivery of Rec.A9, including a Centre of Restorative Excellence; Progress those elements that are within the DoJ's gift through the work of the Interim Protocol Lead	The Executive Office commissioned a Strategic Insight Lab, which included six key Departments as well as statutory and restorative justice partners. A report on the findings has been shared with Department of Justice officials. The outworkings of the report are to be further considered by the Executive Office. The Protocol Lead has undertaken a range of work which reflects the intended responsibilities of a CORE as it relates to the criminal justice system, including the development of a new Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework, promotional material to raise awareness of restorative justice and engagement with a wide range of interested stakeholders.
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5. CONCLUSION

The Department has again seen significant progress during 2025/26, to continue to deliver on the commitments laid out in the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy. This follows on from the progress made in 2024/25 by the Protocol Lead engaging with stakeholders from Northern Ireland and other countries around the world to inform the creation of the new Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework which was published in October 2025.

The publication of the Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework, along with the Restorative Justice Protocol 2023, allowed for both practitioners and organisations to make application for restorative justice accreditation which resulted in seven organisations, 20 organisational practitioners and two Independent Practitioners being accredited by the Department. A register of accredited organisations and practitioners will be made available on the Department of Justice website.

The Restorative Justice Working Group (RJWG) continued to be involved in the development of not only the Year 5 Action Plan but also the consideration of potential funding models and the phased expansion of adult restorative justice through the diversionary pilot. As a result this annual report has been informed by the work that RJWG members have done in the past year and the outcomes achieved.

The Adult Restorative Justice pilot focusing on diversionary cases that can be diverted before they reach court went live on 30 March 2026. A Restorative Justice Task and Finish Group was established to learn from previous workstreams and develop the pilot to give it the highest chance of success.

The formation of a NIPS Restorative Practice Steering Group also allowed us to make progress in considering the use of RP into the three establishments. Initially the group reviewed and revised the existing NIPS RP Framework, the main purpose of which is to provide strategic direction to managers and staff and outline how restorative practice will be grown and embedded in the organisation. Work has also progressed to consider the development of a delivery plan, containing objectives and measurable targets going forward.

A significant amount of awareness raising took place in the form of stakeholder and public engagement in the lead up to the Adult Restorative Justice pilot going live on 30 March 2026.

A social media awareness campaign was launched in the weeks ahead of the go live date. A series of videos, quotes and facts about restorative justice launched on the Department's social media and shared by partner organisations.

Several pieces of promotional material were developed and shared widely, including Restorative Justice information and preparation leaflets for both those who have been

harmed victims and who caused harm, a short, animated video produced by a professional studio now explains what restorative justice is and the potential benefits.

The launch of the new Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework and accompanying accreditation process were promoted through the Department's social media accounts along with press releases.

In terms of public engagement, last year's annual report was published in January 2026. The Restorative Justice Council's annual conference was also held in November 2025 and was both widely publicised and well attended.

In conclusion, there has been excellent progress in several areas of work over the last year, progress which has laid the groundwork for us to do even more in 2026/27 and continue to deliver on the commitments laid out in the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy. If we can keep this momentum going into and beyond the new accreditation process this will positively improve access to valuable restorative justice services that will positively improve the lives of participants, their friends and family and communities they live in.