

WRITTEN STATEMENT TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

**INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CIRCUMSTANCES RELATING TO THE RELEASE
OF A PRISONER UNDER THE COMPASSIONATE TEMPORARY RELEASE
SCHEME – REVIEW LEAD AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Naomi Long MLA

Minister of Justice

1 October 2026

I have previously updated the Assembly on the circumstances relating to the release of Gary Anderson under the compassionate temporary release (CTR) scheme. I wish to update Members on the independent review that has been commissioned.

Firstly, however, I welcome the arrest of Gary Anderson in the Republic of Ireland and I thank the Police Service of Northern Ireland and An Garda Síochána for their swift and effective work in locating and apprehending him.

I also met with the family of Karol Kelly last week and I know it has been a deeply distressing time for them. It is critical that the criminal justice system learns from the events around handling of the CTR application by Gary Anderson to avoid any retraumatisation of victims.

When I requested that officials carry out an urgent examination of the circumstances relating to how the case was initially progressed, I made clear to Members that there was a need for an independent review into handling of the case.

I asked the Permanent Secretary to commission the independent review and I can now confirm that Phil Copple CB, formerly Director General of Operations in HM Prison and Probation Service, has agreed to lead the review. To assist with the review, the Reviewer will have direct access to Senior Crown Counsel for support in considering relevant legal issues.

In addition, the Commissioner Designate for Victims and Witnesses of Crime, Geri Hanna, has confirmed that she is available to provide advice to ensure that relevant issues are considered from the perspective of victims.

I am grateful for the willingness of everyone involved to support this important work.

The Terms of Reference for the review are published alongside this statement.

The review will examine the decisions and circumstances which led to the release of Gary Anderson and provide an independent and objective assessment of the handling and outworkings of his CTR application. Its purpose is to establish the facts, understand what happened and when, identify any lessons arising from the handling of the case, and make recommendations for improvement.

Where lessons can be learned, they must be learned, and where improvements are required, they must be made. This is critical for the handling of future applications for CTR.

Given the seriousness of the issues involved, it is important that the review is able to follow the evidence wherever it leads and reach its conclusions independently. At the same time, I have asked that the review be progressed as expeditiously as possible so that any lessons can be identified and any necessary improvements implemented at the earliest opportunity.

I will update the Assembly on the outcome of the review and any recommendations arising from its findings.