Building strong foundations and empowering change

Strategic Framework 2026 - 2027



Northern Ireland Executive

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Introduction

Reducing offending and reoffending remains a significant challenge for Northern Ireland. It continues to cause serious and lasting harm to victims of crime, to families, businesses and communities, and places sustained pressure on public services that respond to that harm. While Northern Ireland remains one of the safest places to live in the UK, these impacts undermine confidence, affect life chances and create long-term social and economic costs that extend well beyond the justice system.

Addressing this challenge is a clear Executive and Ministerial priority. Through the Programme for Government (2024-2027) - Doing What Matters Most, the Northern Ireland Executive has committed to developing a new, evidence based, cross-Government approach to reducing offending and reoffending. This reflects a shared understanding that meaningful and lasting reductions in harm depend on coordinated action across government, alongside partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

This interim Strategic Framework has been developed to support delivery of that commitment. It sets out a shared, cross Government approach to reducing offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland for the period 2026 to autumn 2027, providing a clear foundation for coordinated action across government and beyond. It brings together existing priorities and early actions, whilst laying the groundwork for the development of a longer term strategy.

At its core, the approach set out in this Framework is two-fold and seeks to address offending across the life course through two key 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.

Together, these two aims underpin this Framework and guide the outcomes and actions set out in the sections that follow.

The Framework builds directly on learning from over a decade of delivery, research and practice, through the 2013 Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending and the 2015 Supporting Change: A Strategic Approach to Desistance, and supports a more coherent, measurable, outcome-focused cross Government response.

Overall, this Strategic Framework recognises that responsibility for reducing offending and reoffending is shared across government and beyond. Lasting change requires coordinated, preventative action, clearer alignment of effort and sustained partnership working. In setting a clear direction for 2026 through to 2027, this Framework provides a strong platform for collective action now, while laying the foundations for the longer-term cross-Government strategy to follow.



Reducing Offending and Reoffending Strategic Framework 2026 -2027

At a Glance

Key Facts

26.3%	17.6%	1,911
first-time offences	reoffend within 12 months	average daily prison population

Our Two Aims

Reduce offending through prevention and early intervention

Reduce reoffending by strengthening deterrence, rehabilitation and resettlement

The Four Outcomes



Health and Wellbeing



Community and Inclusion



Education and Employability



Justice and Rehabilitation

Our Commitments



Prevention First



Collaboration



Innovation



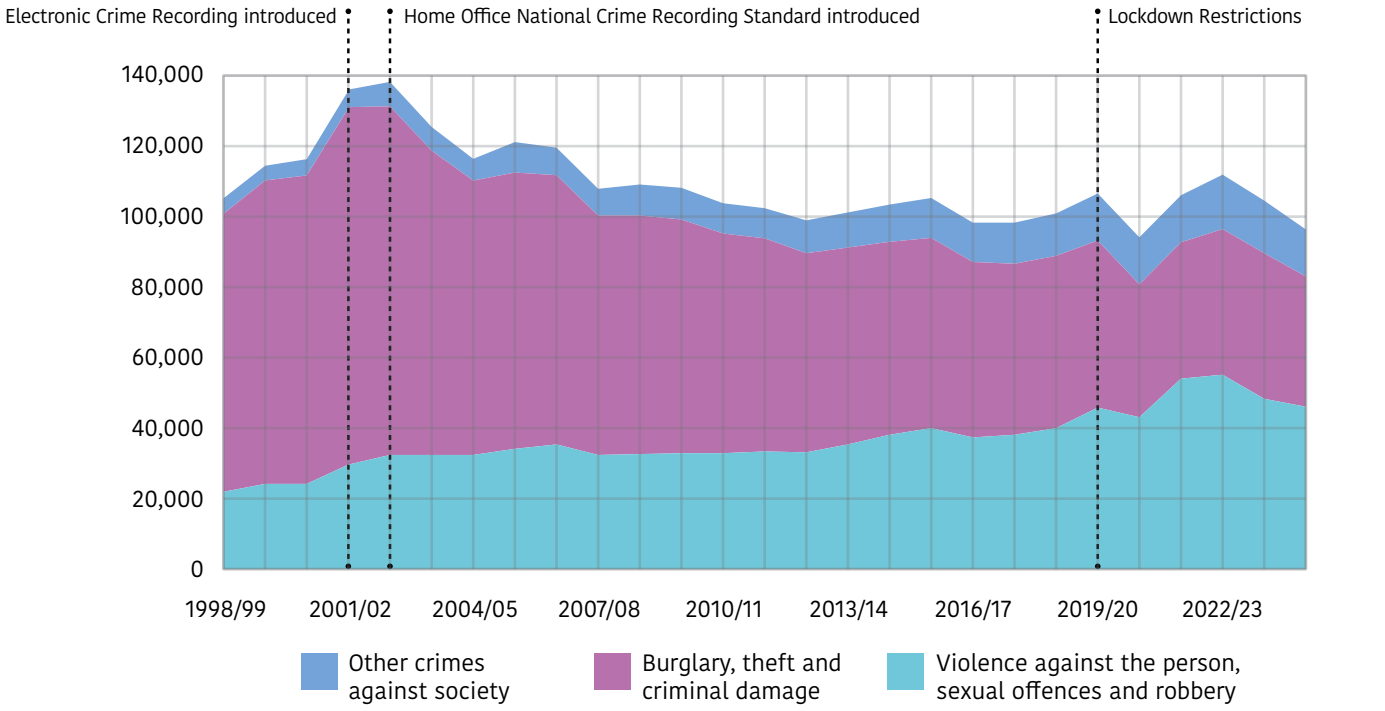
Accountability

Context

Northern Ireland is one of the safest places to live in the UK, with comparatively low levels of recorded crime and anti social behaviour. This is a significant achievement and a strength to be recognised and protected. In 2024/25, recorded crime fell to 95,968 offences[1], the second lowest level since records began in 1998/99, and anti social behaviour also reached its lowest level on record[2]. These trends are reflected in the Programme for Government Wellbeing Framework[3], where key measures show sustained progress, including a reduction in crime prevalence over the past decade.

Crime rates in Northern Ireland stand at 50 offences per 1,000 population in 2024/25, compared with 87 offences per 1,000 population in England and Wales[4]. This comparison highlights Northern Ireland's relatively strong position in overall crime levels within the UK context.

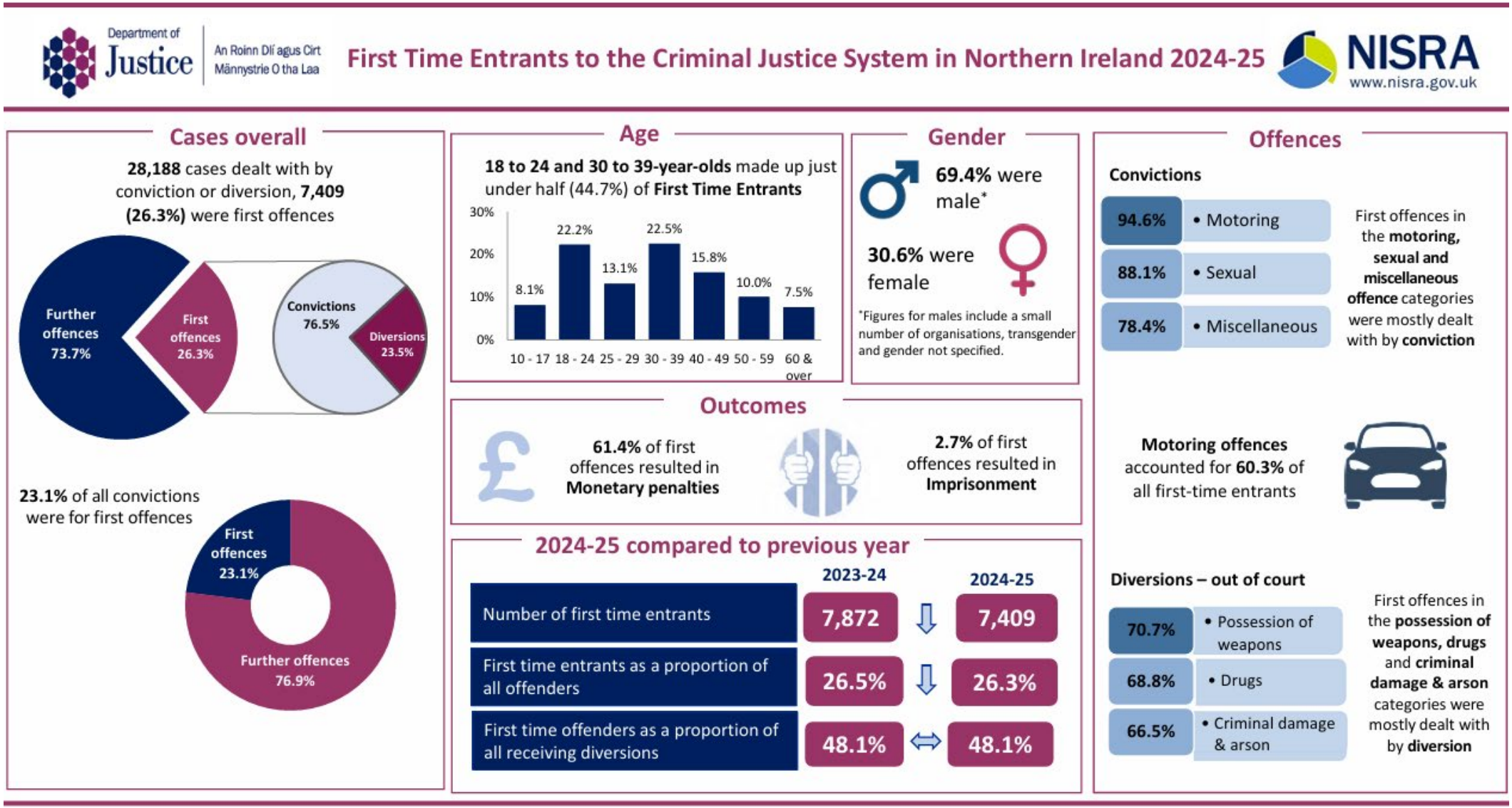
Figure 1: Trends in police recorded crime 1998/99 to 2024/25[1]



However, offending and reoffending continue to cause significant harm to individuals, families, victims, businesses and communities, and carry substantial long term costs for society as a whole. Behind every offence there are people affected by harm: victims whose lives may be disrupted or permanently changed; families and children living with trauma; communities experiencing fear and instability; and individuals whose life chances are diminished through contact with the criminal justice system. While the economic costs of offending and reoffending are considerable, the impact goes far beyond financial loss and includes social, emotional and intergenerational consequences.

1 Crime Rates Recorded in Northern Ireland Drop to the Second Lowest Level Since 1998/99 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
2 Anti-Social Behaviour Incidents Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland Update to 31st March 2025
3 PfG Wellbeing Framework - Crime prevalence rate
4 Police recorded crime reaches second lowest level since 1998/99 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Figure 2: First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2024-25[3]

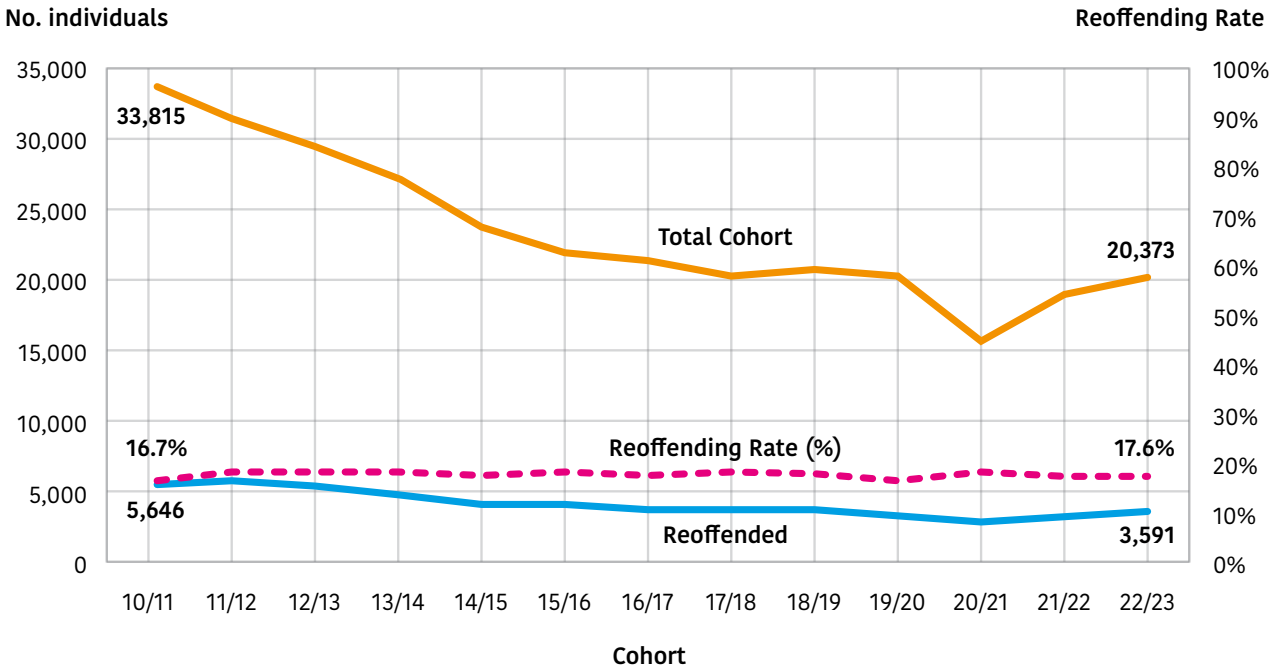


For further information and the full statistical bulletin go to www.justice-ni.gov.uk. Some icons used within this document were sourced from https://www.flaticon.com/

A significant proportion of offending in Northern Ireland involves people coming into contact with the criminal justice system for the first time. In 2024/25, 26.3% of recorded offences were first offences[5], underlining the importance of prevention and early intervention to reduce entry into the criminal justice system in the first place.

Alongside this, reoffending continues to contribute to ongoing harm and demand on public services. In 2022/23[6], 17.6% of individuals reoffended within one year following release from custody. Of those who reoffended, 46.2% committed their first reoffence within the first three months, underlining the importance of effective rehabilitation and resettlement support in preventing further involvement with the criminal justice system.

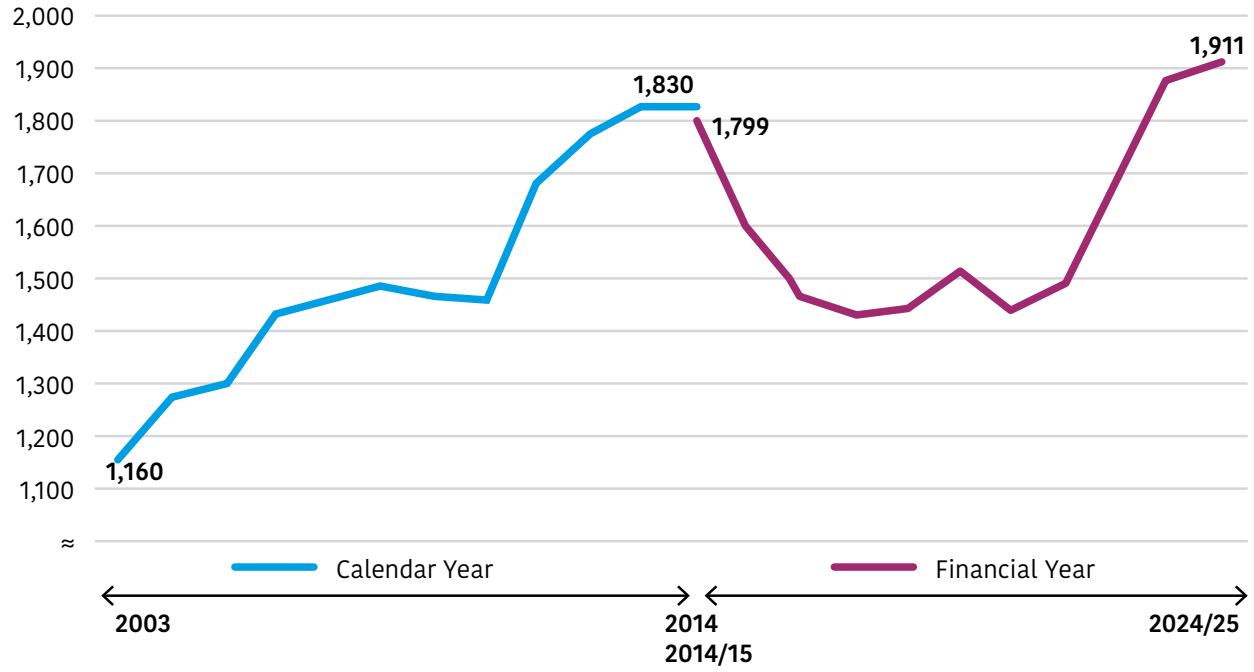
Figure 3: Overall reoffending cohorts, 2010/11 to 2022/23[4]



In 2024/25[7], the average daily prison population rose to around 1,911, the highest level in a decade, reflecting sustained pressures within the justice system. This again reinforces the importance of prevention, early intervention and effective rehabilitation and resettlement across the system.

5 First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2023/24 published | Department of Justice
6 Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland (20223 Cohort)
7 Prison population in Northern Ireland rises to an average of 1,911 in 2024/25 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Figure 4: Average Daily Prison Population 2003 to 2024/25



These trends have remained broadly consistent over many years and highlight that, alongside the progress made in reducing crime overall, sustained and focused action is necessary to reduce harm and prevent cycles of offending and reoffending from becoming entrenched.

In this context, offending and reoffending should not be understood as a narrow measure of prison performance. Outcomes resulting in contact with the criminal justice system are shaped by a wide range of factors that extend beyond custody, including access to housing, healthcare, education, employment, family support and community connections. Rates of reoffending are best understood as a societal-level indicator of how effectively wider systems are working together to prevent harm, support rehabilitation and enable people to live safely and build stable, positive lives.

Case for Change

In Northern Ireland, the scale and persistence of harm caused by offending behaviour, and the long-term social and economic costs of responding too late to preventable harms, provide a compelling starting position. Every incident of offending creates victims, and the impact of this on individuals, families, businesses and communities can be profound and long lasting. Preventing offending and supporting people to move away from harmful behaviours at the earliest opportunity can reduce the number of victims, limit harm and offer better value for the public purse than repeated crisis-led interventions.

The total social and economic cost of crime in Northern Ireland was estimated at £3.4 billion in 2022/23. This estimate reflects a combination of costs borne by victims, communities, businesses, together with expenditure within the criminal justice system. We recognise that crime also places financial pressures on other public sectors, including health, housing and employment.

Custody is, in some cases, a necessary and proportionate response to offending. It is also resource-intensive, with annual costs of approximately £57,000 per prisoner in 2024/25[8]. Where appropriate and safe, alternatives such as community based disposals and interventions can provide alternative ways to hold people to account, manage risks to protect the public, while supporting rehabilitation.

The Framework also recognises that imprisonment can have wider impacts on individuals and families; including disruption to employment, loss of household income, housing instability, poorer health and wellbeing, and weakened family relationships. These impacts can affect not only individuals convicted of offences, but also their children, families and wider support networks.

Historically, services supporting victims, those at risk of offending, and those who offend have not always been designed or delivered as coordinated, cross departmental solutions. Continuing with current patterns of delivery risks placing additional pressure on already stretched services across health, social care, housing, education, training, and the community and voluntary sector. Doing nothing is unlikely to reduce offending or reoffending or to break entrenched cycles of harm.

This interim Framework sets out a cross-Government approach, informed by a public health perspective, that places prevention and early intervention at its core while also supporting proportionate responses to offending that align with a range of sentencing purposes (including punishment, public protection, deterrence, rehabilitation and reparation). Responsibility for addressing many of these underlying drivers sits across Departments, statutory partners, and agencies beyond the justice system.

By aligning programmes, investment and coordinated delivery across the Departments for Communities, Economy, Education, the Executive Office, Health and Justice, this Strategic Framework sets out shared priorities to reduce harm and improve outcomes for people and communities across Northern Ireland.

8 This figure is indicative of the scale of funding required to operate the prison system and should not be interpreted as a direct or immediate saving that can be realised by imprisoning one fewer person. Meaningful financial savings can only be achieved through sustained, long term reductions in the prison population that allow structural changes, such as closing accommodation, reducing overtime and adjusting staffing levels.

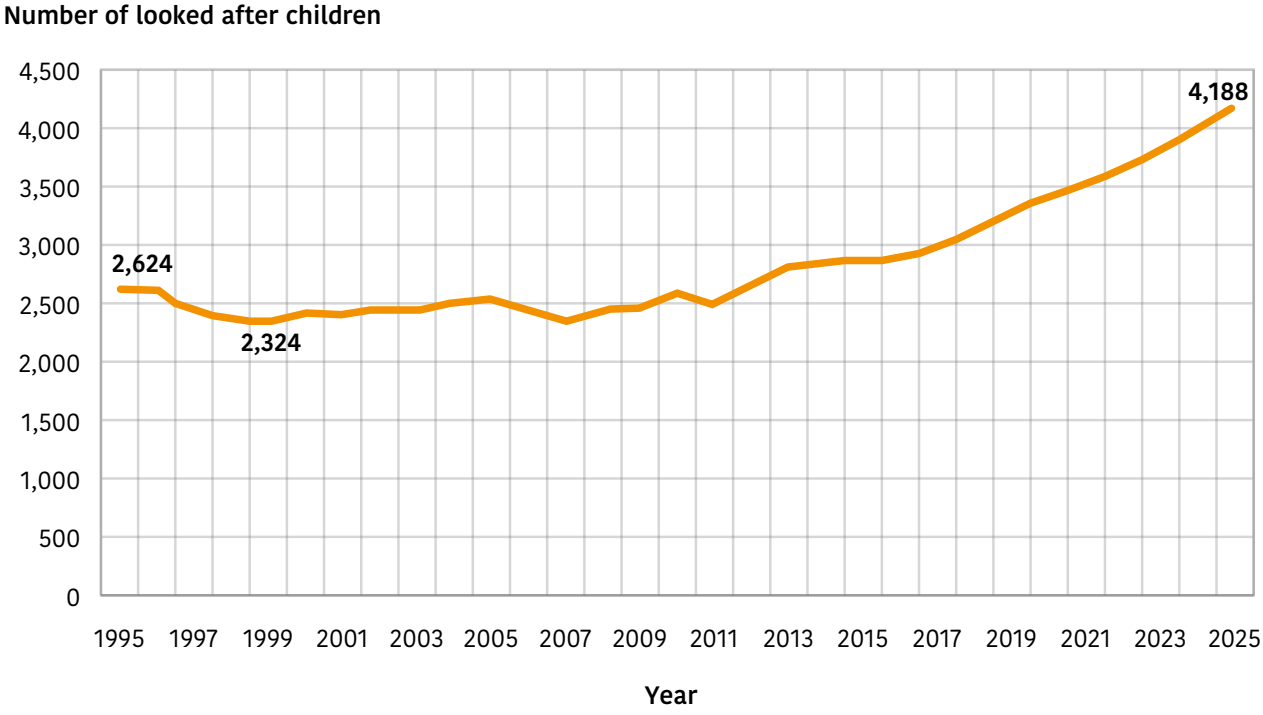
Understanding the Drivers of Offending

Reducing offending and reoffending requires recognition that involvement in harmful and criminal behaviour is influenced by a range of wider socio economic factors rather than individual choice alone. Evidence indicates 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 support services can be associated with increased vulnerability to offending and subsequent involvement with the justice system.

Research highlights associations between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and later outcomes linked to offending. Evidence shows that ACEs, care experience, family instability, parental imprisonment and poverty are associated with poorer educational attainment, poorer health outcomes and increased likelihood of later contact with the criminal justice system. While these factors do not determine outcomes for individuals, they are widely recognised as increasing exposure to risk and reducing protective factors over a person's life course. The first prevalence study of ACEs in the Northern Ireland context shows that higher levels of childhood adversity are associated with lower educational outcomes for individuals, increased school exclusions, mental ill-health, substance use and other health-harming behaviours. These outcomes are themselves recognised as factors that can increase vulnerability to later involvement in harmful and offending behaviour.

Northern Ireland has also seen sustained growth in the number of children and young people in care. The number of children in care rose from 3,362 in 2019 to 4,188 at 31 March 2025 , representing an increase of approximately 20-25% over six years and the highest level recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Figure 5: Children in Care in Northern Ireland at 31 March (1995 – 2025)[8]



Care experience is widely recognised as a marker for higher exposure to adversity and service involvement. Evidence on the youth justice system in Northern Ireland has previously highlighted the over-representation of children in care among those in contact with youth justice services. Care experience is not a direct cause of offending, but it can reflect experiences of cumulative adversity and unmet needs - indicators of where earlier intervention and support may help reduce later harm. For example, young people who have experienced instability in care may face challenges such as disrupted education or lack of emotional support, which can increase vulnerability to negative influences and risky behaviours. While most children with care experience do not offend, care experience remains a strong marker for exposure to multiple risk factors associated with later justice involvement.

Intergenerational patterns of offending are also evident. Parental imprisonment is recognised as a form of childhood adversity and is strongly associated with increased risks of poorer outcomes and later justice contact. Evidence shows that children, who grow up with a parent who has been imprisoned, are around twice as likely to have contact with the criminal justice system themselves compared with those without this experience.

Conversely, 'protective factors' such as stability in accommodation, supportive family and peer relationships, alongside participation in education and training; access to appropriate health support; and pathways into meaningful employment are recognised as positive contributors to long term desistance from offending and improved outcomes. Progressing an understanding of both risk and protective factors to intervene earlier across a range of public services can help strengthen protection and reduce harm. This is central to breaking cycles of disadvantage, reducing future demand on the justice system and shaping a preventative, whole system response spanning social care, education, health, housing, communities and justice.



The Way Forward

The current strategic approach is outlined in the 2013 Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending and the 2015 Supporting Change: A strategic approach to desistance. In line with the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (2024-2027) – 'Doing What Matters Most', and recommendations from the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Account Committee for a contemporary, measurable approach to reduce offending and reoffending, a parallel process was embarked on to develop this Framework alongside the development of a new longer-term strategy.

This is an interim, Strategic Framework for 2026-27. It sets out the first steps in a longer-term approach to reducing offending and reoffending. It provides space for innovation, testing and learning, identifying what works and where further development is needed. It is both a bridge and a foundation: connecting current work to the longer-term strategy whilst laying the foundations for a sustainable, whole system response.

Work on the longer-term strategy is underway and will be informed by the Call for Views which launched in June 2026, as well as a public consultation on the draft strategy in 2027.

Working Together Across Government

Reducing offending and reoffending requires collective responsibility. The causes and consequences of harm cut across communities, education, employment, health, housing, and justice, and cannot be addressed by any single Department alone.

This Strategic Framework establishes a shared approach to coordination, delivery and collective oversight across the Executive for the period 2026 - autumn 2027. It strengthens alignment between Departments, promotes more, effective use of evidence and data, and seeks to ensure that programmes and interventions reinforce one another rather than operating in isolation.

The Framework brings together a wide range of existing activity that already contributes to reducing offending and reoffending (further detail on these programmes of work is set out in Annex 2.). It provides a common structure through which this work can be connected, aligned and strengthened, supporting greater coherence and impact across the system.

Arrangements for longer-term planning, including how future activity will be developed and sustained beyond 2027, will be set out through the new strategy. In this way, the Framework acts as a practical bridge, supporting coordinated action now, while informing and shaping the longer-term strategic approach.

Our Approach

This Strategic Framework sets out how we will work together to reduce offending and reoffending. The approach is built around four shared commitments, selected to reflect the evidence on the key drivers of offending and focus effort where coordinated action is most likely to reduce harm and prevent crime. Together, these commitments provide a practical foundation for a whole system response and shape the outcomes that follow.

- **Prevention First** - acting earlier to address known risk factors such as childhood adversity, disengagement from education, health needs and substance use, with the aim of reducing entry into the criminal justice system and long term social and economic costs.
- **Collaboration and Engagement** - coordinating support around individuals, families and communities to ensure services are joined up, timely and responsive to need; including for victims, those at risk of offending, and those who offend.
- **Innovation** - testing, learning from and scaling evidence led approaches that support desistance and reduce harm.
- **Accountability and Transparency** - providing clear oversight, shared responsibility and reporting on progress.

Engagement and Development

To ensure the Framework reflects shared priorities and is grounded in practical insight, a focused programme of engagement was undertaken across Departments, delivery partners and those with direct experience of the criminal justice system. This included:

- **Six Northern Ireland Departments** (Communities, Economy, Education, the Executive Office, Health and Justice)
  - (i) meetings held with senior officials to consider the proposed approach and direction of travel.
  - (ii) further targeted engagements with key Departments, their Agencies, and with Criminal Justice organisations.
- **Department of Finance's Innovation and Consultancy Services** - commissioned to facilitate a Strategic Insight Lab process, involving a series of cross-Departmental roundtables, culminating in a two-day stakeholder workshop in November 2025 that that supported the co-design of the outcomes; and
- **Individuals with lived experience of the Justice system in Northern Ireland** - engagement with individuals about their lived experience, supported by statutory and community and voluntary sector partners, to capture insight and perspectives.

Collectively, these engagement activities informed the development of this Framework and confirmed broad recognition of the need for a robust, coordinated, preventative and evidence led approach to reduce offending and reoffending.

Delivering the Strategic Framework: Outcomes for 2026 to 2027

This Strategic Framework sets out the outcomes that will guide delivery of the cross-Government response to reducing offending and reoffending from 2026 through to autumn 2027, providing a clear focus for action across the remainder of the Assembly mandate and into the development of the longer-term strategy.

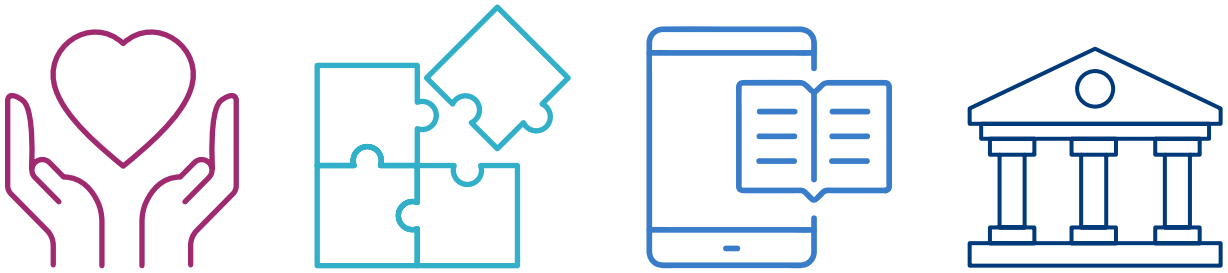
The Framework is organised around four strategic outcomes:

- **Health and Wellbeing** – improved health, wellbeing and resilience.
- **Community and Inclusion** – strengthened community support, cohesion and inclusion.
- **Education and Employability** – increased participation in education and employment opportunities.
- **Justice and Rehabilitation** – strengthened restorative and rehabilitative justice, and accountability for harmful behaviour.

These outcomes have been derived directly from the evidence on the key drivers of offending, reoffending and harm, set out earlier in this Framework, and from consideration of where coordinated action is most likely to:

- deliver the greatest preventative impact;
- contribute to measurable reductions in offending and reoffending; and
- reduce long-term social and economic costs.

Taken together, these outcomes provide a coherent structure for delivery from spring 2026 to autumn 2027, linking the root causes of offending to clear areas for action and enabling collective effort to be focused where it is most likely to reduce harm, support rehabilitation and improve safety, while also informing the development of the longer-term strategy.



Outcome 1

Health and Wellbeing

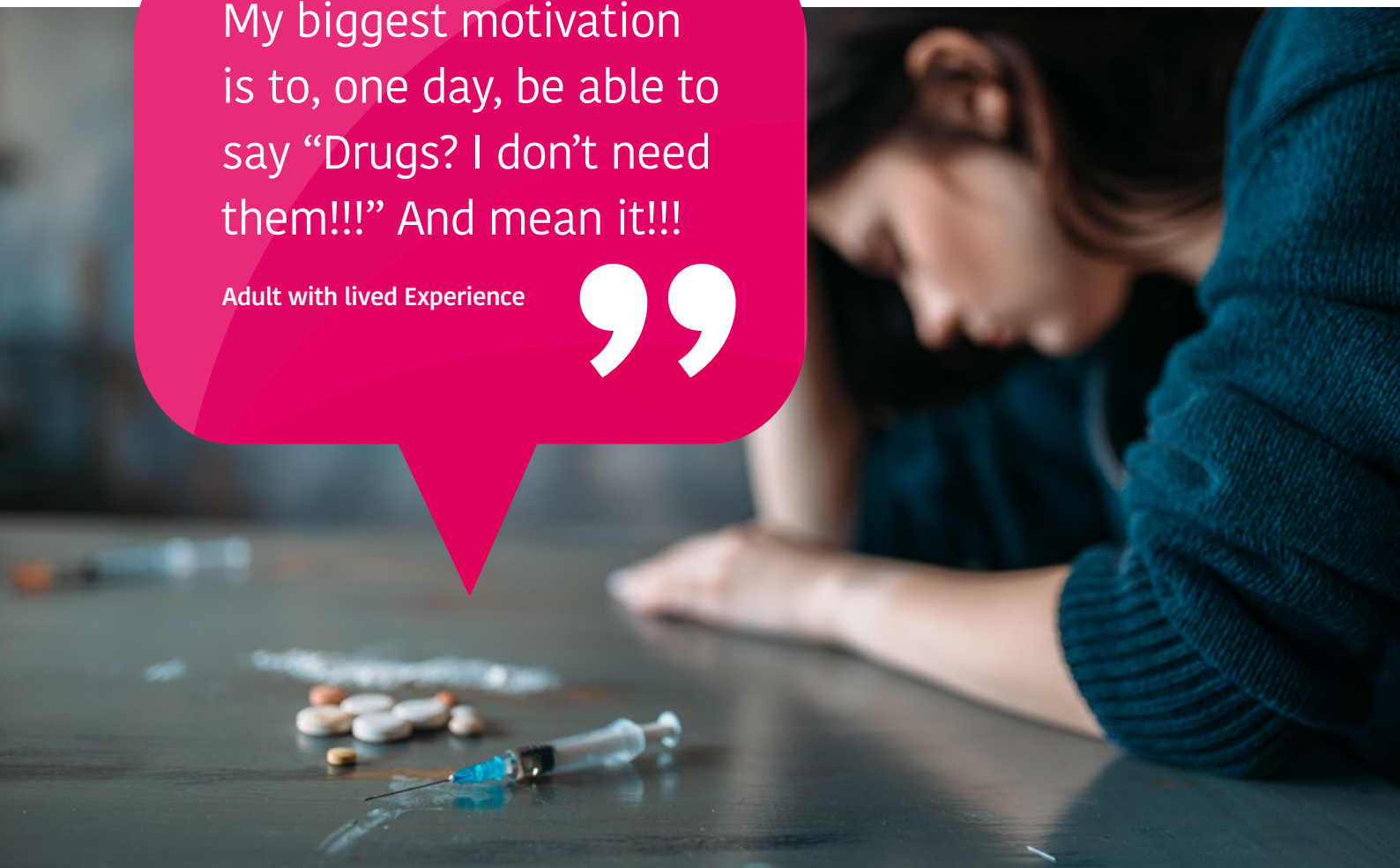
Improved Health, Wellbeing and Resilience

The aim of this outcome is to focus on reducing health-related risks linked to offending behaviours, by improving access to timely, appropriate support and interventions.

Risk factors:
Mental ill-health, untreated trauma, addiction and wider health inequalities increase vulnerability to both offending and victimisation.

Mitigations:
Trauma informed care, mental health and addiction support, and continuity of care at key transition points reduce crisis contact and support stability.

> My biggest motivation is to, one day, be able to say "Drugs? I don't need them!!!" And mean it!!!
>
> **Adult with lived Experience**





Over 2026 - 2027, we will focus on improving access to trauma-informed, mental health and addiction support for those at risk of offending or reoffending. We aim to enable more individuals to access the right help earlier, reducing crisis contact and supporting stability. This should benefit individuals, families and communities by helping to reduce harm and lower the risk of future offending.

The following initiatives will support delivery of this outcome:

- The development of a neighbourhood-based **Family Support Model (Together for Families)** through earlier, preventative services. The model will provide tailored support to address vulnerability and reduce the risk of offending among children and families on the edge of care, exclusion, or justice involvement, preventing escalation into harmful behaviour and increased likelihood of offending.
- **Delivering the Youth Justice Agency Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) partnership** to ensure children and young people involved in offending receive trauma and mental health support, addressing issues that often drive offending behaviour. Through continuity of care and reducing emotional and behavioural triggers, it aims to lower repeat offending and strengthen rehabilitation outcomes.
- **INSYNC**[12] – a support service for those subjected to paramilitary-style violence, providing trauma counselling and practical mentoring. It reduces vulnerability to coercion, helps break cycles that lead to criminal involvement, strengthens personal resilience, and directly contributes to reducing offending and reoffending.

12 This project is funded through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC), which is scheduled to conclude in March 2027.

Outcome 2

Community and Inclusion

Strengthened community support, cohesion and inclusion

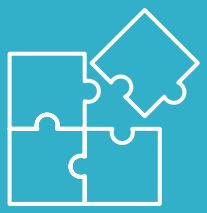
This outcome aims to strengthen the protective role of communities through stable housing, inclusion and local support.

Risk factors:
Poverty, social isolation, unstable accommodation, homelessness and community deprivation heighten vulnerability to harm.

Mitigations:
Housing led approaches, income security and inclusive communities that support prevention, restorative practice and rehabilitation activities.

> Probably having my own house, job and income.
>
> **Youth with lived experience when asked what would help prevent further offending.**





Over 2026 - 2027, we will focus on strengthening protective factors such as stable housing and local support for those at risk of offending. This will support more people to stay safe, included and connected to their communities. This should help reduce vulnerability to harm, improve life chances and help build safer, more resilient communities.

The following initiatives will support delivery of this outcome:

- The **New Foundations Scheme** - A PfG commitment to provide stable housing and wraparound support to help care leavers overcome housing instability, a well recognised driver of offending and reoffending. This group are disproportionately at risk of homelessness, social exclusion, and criminal justice system involvement. By reducing homelessness, this scheme aims to create security and opportunity, contributing to reducing offending and reoffending.
- **Fresh Start Through Sport**[13] - using sport-based interventions to engage young people in areas where paramilitarism and organised crime are prevalent. By building life skills, resilience, and positive peer networks through physical activity, the programme reduces vulnerability to criminal influence and prevents pathways into offending.
- **Ballyarnett Community Safety and Development Programme** will provide wraparound support to young people involved in community unrest and their families, improving community safety and building community capacity.
- **Strengthening Futures** will provide a community-based education and active citizenship project aimed at young people in danger of risk-taking behaviours or being recruited by paramilitary organisations.
- The **Supporting People Modernisation Project (2025-2027)** will modernise the Supporting People Programme by delivering a set of evidence-based improvement recommendations and operational efficiencies. This will improve housing-related support services, leading to better outcomes for vulnerable individuals.
- **Complex lives** is a scheme lead by Belfast City Council, in partnership with Housing, Health and Justice agencies, to support some of the city's most vulnerable people to help break the cycle of chronic homelessness and address on street behaviour. Recognising a person's individual needs, it focuses on providing stability and offers a dedicated point of contact, who can oversee someone throughout their journey, whatever their circumstances. As part of this, a pilot scheme is helping highly vulnerable women through referral by Hydebank Wood Women's Prison, to receive the range of support services they need, stabilise their circumstances and reduce their likelihood of reoffending on release from prison.

13 This project is funded through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC), which is scheduled to conclude in March 2027.

Outcome 3

Education and Employability

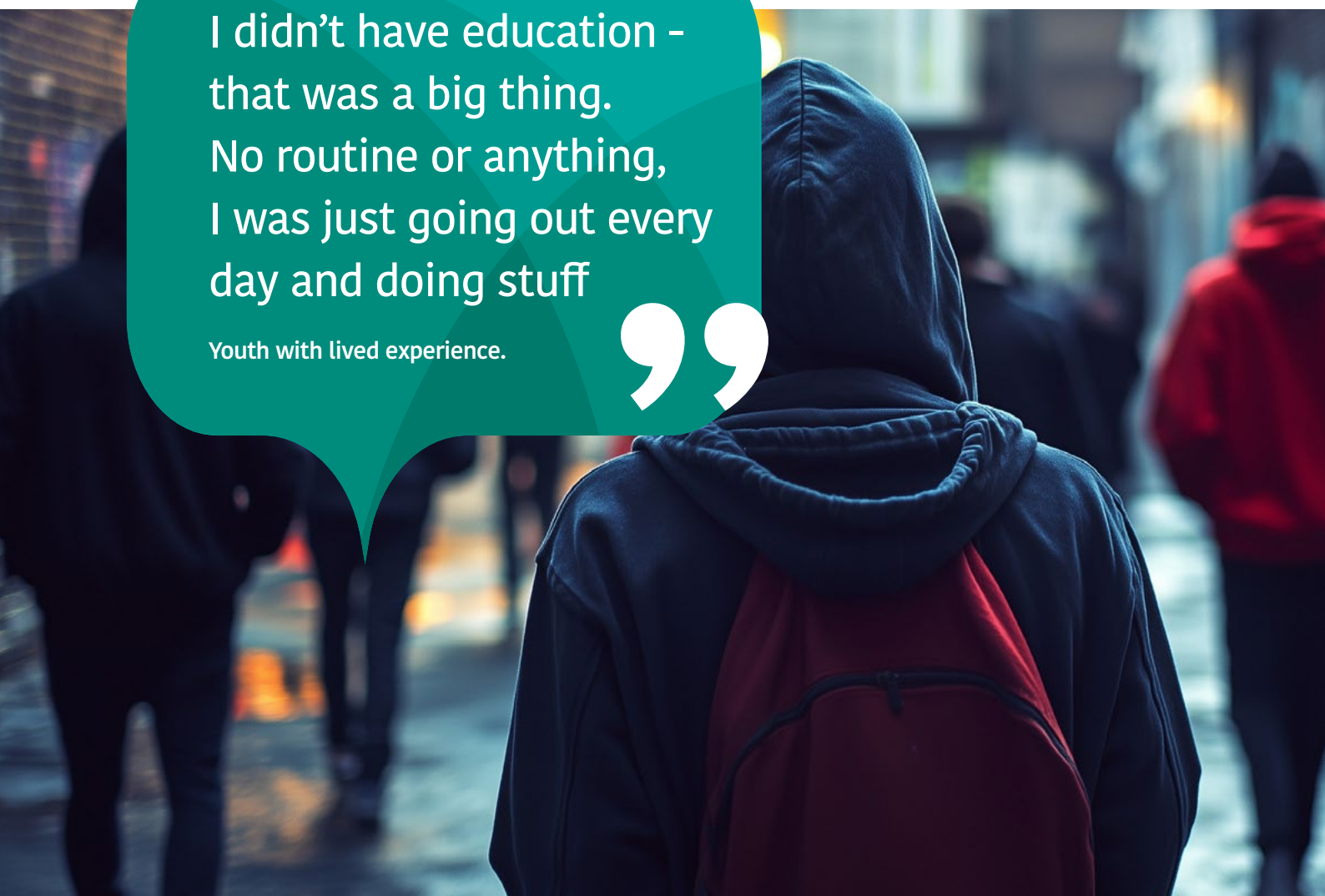
Increased participation of education and employment opportunities

This outcome aims to improve access to education, skills and employment as foundations for long term stability.

Risk factors:
Low educational attainment, disengagement from education and limited employment opportunities or income increase risk.

Mitigations:
Education, training and meaningful employment provide structure, purpose and alternatives to offending.

> I didn't have education - that was a big thing. No routine or anything, I was just going out every day and doing stuff
>
> **Youth with lived experience.**





Over 2026 – 2027, we will focus on increasing engagement in education, training and employment for those at risk of offending or reoffending. We aim to support more young people and adults to build skills, confidence and positive routines. This should help improve long-term stability, help reduce the likelihood of offending and support better outcomes for individuals and communities.

The following initiatives will support delivery of this outcome:

- **Nurture Groups** – to provide emotional and behavioural support for children to keep them engaged in education, improve attendance and behaviour, reducing the risk of involvement with the criminal justice system and the likelihood of exclusion, supporting prevention and long-term desistance.
- **Safer Schools NI** will provide an app and web-based platform offering verified resources to pupils, schools and parents to promote safety and wellbeing. When children know how to stay safe and feel supported, they are better equipped to make positive decisions.
- The **Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework in Education** will continue to promote positive emotional health and wellbeing through the delivery of trauma informed training and professional capacity building. When children feel safe and supported, they are less likely to struggle with behaviours that could lead them to make poor decisions and harmful choices.
- The **Power to Change Campaign** aims to tackle gender-based harmful attitudes and behaviours among men and boys, promoting accountability and active bystander intervention. It focuses on prevention and tackling causes of violence against women and girls early, reducing pathways into offending and reoffending.
- Embedding **Work Coaches** across all prison establishments, linking prisoners to training and employment opportunities, while also signposting them to housing and other essential services. By reducing practical barriers to work and supporting reintegration through sustainable employment pathways, this approach strengthens protective factors against reoffending.

Outcome 4

Justice and Rehabilitation

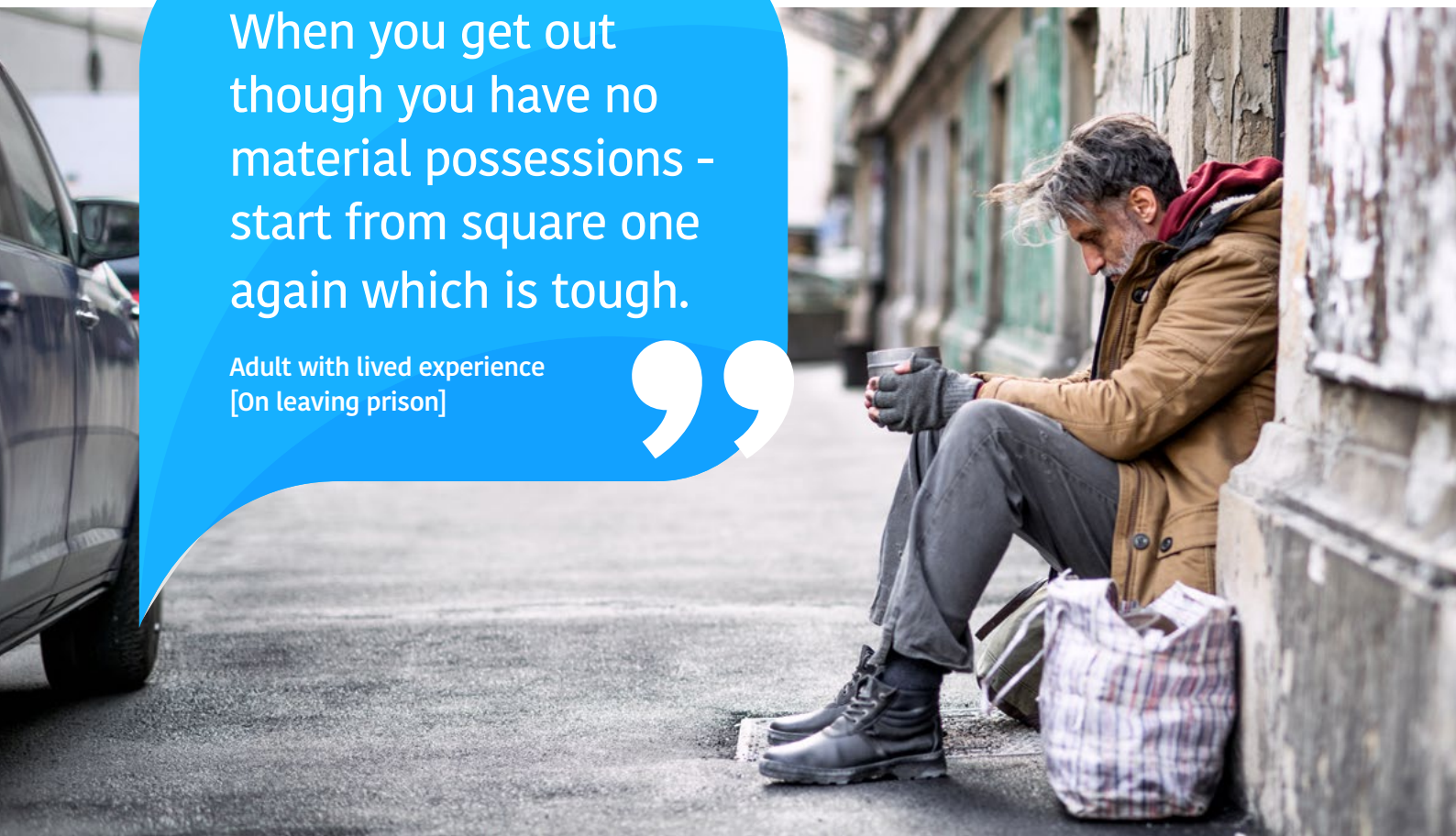
Strengthened restorative and rehabilitative justice and accountability for harmful behaviour

This outcome aims to address the impact of offending on victims and communities, strengthen offender accountability and rehabilitation, and reduce reliance on custody where appropriate, while maintaining public safety.

Risk factors:
Early or repeated contact with the criminal justice system, combined with limited access to effective rehabilitation and resettlement support, increases the likelihood of reoffending and ongoing harm.

Mitigations:
Restorative approaches, timely and proportionate rehabilitation, and strong resettlement support help reduce repeat offending, support reintegration and contribute to safer communities.

> When you get out though you have no material possessions - start from square one again which is tough.
>
> **Adult with lived experience [On leaving prison]**





Over 2026 – 2027 we will focus on expanding access to diversion, restorative justice and rehabilitation, while reducing reliance on custody where appropriate. We expect to see more people held to account in ways that support change, reduce repeat harm and improve reintegration. This will benefit victims, communities and individuals by helping to reduce offending and reoffending and help strengthen public confidence in the justice system.

The following initiatives will support delivery of this outcome:

- **Delivering Earlier Stage Diversion (ESD)** for children involved, or at risk of being involved, in the criminal justice system. ESD uses restorative, trauma-informed interventions to identify low-level offending early and prevent escalation into more serious offending. Through mentoring, family engagement, and community-based programmes, it reduces first-time entrants and lowers the risk of reoffending.
- **The Another Way**[13] initiative is a focused deterrence, youth-work led programme that reduces serious violence by combining clear enforcement messages with credible support. The programme addresses the persistent harms caused by violent gangs and groups, providing a supported opportunity to change through tailored services.
- The **ASPIRE** project[13] works mainly with males aged 16 to 30 by providing early, practical, and mentor led intervention tailored to individual needs, helping them achieve more stable and positive outcomes.
- Expansion of alternatives to custody including the introduction of a **bail support scheme** (initially for women) and greater use of **restorative justice interventions**. Preparatory work is also underway for GPS-enabled electronic monitoring. These measures aim to strengthen offender management, reduce risk and support rehabilitation, helping to lower the likelihood of future offending and reoffending.
- **Connect in Custody** will introduce youth workers into police custody (in selected police custody suites), engaging those aged 18 to 25, at critical points. They will offer support and referral to services to help reduce reoffending and promote rehabilitation, improving the response to serious violence and targeting support for those involved in (or at risk) of such behaviour.
- The Engage programme[13] – working with women in custody and the community, to address addiction, trauma, mental health, wellbeing, housing, and employment. By tackling these underlying vulnerabilities, it helps reduce the risk of reoffending and supports successful rehabilitation.

13 This project is funded through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC), which is scheduled to conclude in March 2027.

Implementation Roadmap 2026 - 2027

The interim Strategic Framework will guide delivery of the cross-Government response to reducing offending and reoffending over 2026 and 2027. It sets out the first phase of a longer-term approach to reducing offending and reoffending, focused on addressing the drivers of harm, improving outcomes and laying the foundations for the longer-term strategy to be introduced in 2027.

Over this period, delivery will be driven through the four strategic outcomes set out in this Framework. Together, these outcomes provide the structure through which prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation and resettlement activity will be aligned and progressed across government and with partners.

Across 2026-2027, implementation will therefore focus on:

- delivering action under each of the four outcomes, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention, deterrence, rehabilitation, resettlement, and place-based approaches that reduce harm and improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- embedding learning from delivery across the four outcomes to support continuous improvement and inform future planning;
- strengthening governance and oversight to ensure alignment of priorities, collective oversight and effective use of evidence; and
- using delivery of the Framework to inform the development of the longer-term strategy, including through improved data, shared learning and partnership working.

Progress against the four outcomes will be monitored and reported transparently, including an annual progress update setting out achievements, challenges and learning.

Taken together, this approach will ensure that by autumn 2027, we are better positioned to deliver a whole-system, cross-government approach that supports reductions in offending and reoffending and improves outcomes for people and communities across Northern Ireland.

Measuring Success

Delivering meaningful and lasting change requires clear measurement, consistent tracking of progress, and openness about what is working and what is not. As part of the new longer-term strategy, an Outcomes Measurement Framework, baselined on the current Northern Ireland position, will also be developed with regular progress reporting intervals.

The evidence base underpinning this Framework will continue to evolve. This ensures our approach remains grounded in what works, responsive to local context, and becomes more robust as new insights emerge.

At project level, each initiative will report on outcomes and impact to identify what is effective and where gaps remain. While our ability to measure every aspect is constrained by current data and system limitations, available information across Departments will be maximised to build a clearer picture of need and progress.

As data sharing develops and longer-term measurement improves, we will be better equipped to understand whether interventions are delivering value and contributing to cumulative impact across the system. This approach supports a more coherent, evidence driven response to reducing offending and reoffending.

Governance

Governance will be led by a new Strategic Board, providing collective oversight of the Framework. Responsibility for delivery of individual actions and initiatives will continue to sit within relevant departmental structures, with progress reported transparently and aligned with Programme for Government commitments.

Annex 1

Strategic Framework Delivery Plan 2026 to 2027

Health and Wellbeing	Community and Inclusion	Education and Employability	Justice and Rehabilitation

Rag Status

Blue	Green	Amber	Red
Achieved	On Track for Delivery	Progress slower than planned / significant doubt on achievement of aim in timeframe	Aims not achieved / not expected to be achieved within the timeframe

Themes

To reduce Offending	To reduce Reoffending



Outcome 1

Health and Wellbeing

#	Action	Lead / Partners	Milestones and Targets 2026 - 2027	RAG Status	**Outcomes:** How is it/will it be measured, monitored and evaluated? How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?
1. ↓	**Together for Families - Local Support Model** Introduce a new neighbourhood-based model for Family Support.	**DoH** DE; EA; DoJ; YJA; NIHE	• June 2026: Together for Families operating model for Intensive Family Support Service agreed. • July 2026: Implementation team, Steering Group and Implementation plan for Together for Families in place. • August 2026: Evaluation framework for Together for Families agreed with National Lottery Community Fund and in place. • September 2026: Together for Families resource in place for 29 Family Support Hubs. • September 2026: Design of Together for Families Family Support Services Open List complete and procurement commenced. • December 2026: Enhanced Family Support Service in place.		• An Outcomes Framework, including measures of success, will be developed.
2. ↓ ↓	**CAMHS/YJA Service** Consolidate and evaluate the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Youth Justice Agency joint services.	**YJA** HSCTs, DoH, DoJ	• Consolidate the longer-term funding of the CAMHS/YJA Service by April 2026. • Evaluate the CAMHS/YJA Service by September 2026. • Quarterly progress update. • Meet bi-monthly with QUB for update on the progress of the evaluation.		• Improve outcomes for justice involved young people.

↓ To reduce Offending ↓ To reduce Reoffending

3.	**Insync** To provide trauma informed mentoring and counselling support to victims of paramilitary-style violence, improving safety, wellbeing, resilience, and social inclusion, including supporting those in the criminal justice system to reintegrate and reduce vulnerability to paramilitary influence.	**NIACRO**	• Deliver Insync to 70 referrals. • Provide mentoring and counselling interventions as required based on assessed need. • Improvement in help and support for victims of paramilitary harm. • Increase in individual protective factors and reducing risk of being involved in Paramilitary or Organised Crime. • Increase in ex-prisoner (re) integration.		• No. of referrals (80). • No. of people supported (70). • No. of interventions (Average of 12 per client). • 60% of clients reporting improvement across a minimum of 3 key life domains including accommodation, finances, relationships, community connection, safety/living under threat, mental health, emotional regulation, substance use, positive use of time and employability. • 65% of those accessing counselling support report improved mental health and wellbeing. • 50% of ex-prisoner clients reporting increased stability and support networks and living a crime-free life. Reported on exit. • 60% reporting reduced vulnerability to paramilitary and organised crime influence.

Outcome 2

Community and Inclusion

#	Action	Lead / Partners	Milestones and Targets 2026 - 2027	RAG Status	**Outcomes:** How is it/will it be measured, monitored and evaluated? How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?
4.	**New Foundations pilot scheme** Launched in Dec 2025, it aims to secure 30 units of accommodation along with tailored support packages in the first year.	**DfC** NIHE HSCTs	• Secure 30 units of accommodation, along with tailored support packages, by December 2026.		• In line with the PfG Oversight Framework.
5.	**Fresh Start in the Community Projects** **Fresh Start Through Sport** Engage young people at risk of involvement in organised crime, paramilitary activity or entering the criminal justice system, in Fresh Start Through Sport programme.	**DfC** PSNI VCS	• 40 young people involved, across four target areas. • 70% of young people to continue with sport and volunteering following their involvement with the programme.		• No. of young people involved. • Percentage of young people to continue in sport and volunteering. • Percentage of young people with improvement in a range of metrics around personal development. • Percentage of young people with improvement in a range of metrics around citizenship.
	Ballyarnett Community Safety & Development Programme Provide wraparound family and youth support to young people identified at risk of involvement in community unrest and their families. Provide of a range of community safety / capacity building initiatives and volunteering opportunities.	**DfC** VCS	• 24 young people and their families involved. • 4 community capacity building initiatives. • 5 community safety initiatives.		• No. of young people and their families involved. • No. of community capacity building initiatives delivered. • No. of community safety initiatives delivered. • Percentage of young people with enhanced problem-solving skills. • Percentage of young people and their families with increased sense of control. • Percentage of parents with increase in confidence in supporting their children's needs. • Percentage of parents expressing interest in greater community engagement.

5. cont'd	**Strengthening Futures** Provide a community-based education and active citizenship project aimed at young adults in danger of risk-taking behaviours or being recruited by paramilitary organisations.	**DfC** VCS	• 45 young people involved with Active Citizenship element. • 36 young women involved with Girls Voices element. • Community Safety event delivered to 80 young people.		• No. of young people involved with the programme. • No. of young people completing Open College Network qualifications. • No. of young people with more confidence and greater ability to make informed and positive life choices. • No. of young people more willing to become involved in volunteering and community-based activities. • No. of young people with a greater mental resilience, greater confidence to ask for help, and greater knowledge of where to access help if needed. • No. of young people who are more resilient to paramilitary influence and involvement in paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.
6.	**Supporting People Modernisation** Bring forward a Supporting People modernisation programme.	**DfC** NIHE DoJ DoH HSCTs	**Stage 3** • Test & Learn/ Implementation by end of March 2027. • Reconfiguration of service provision to contemporary needs from Strategic Needs Assessment review and 'test and learn' delivery approaches. • Monitor and evaluate overall implementation (on track to start end of Stage 2).		• Individuals will be enabled to sustain safe, stable tenancies.
7.	**Complex Lives – Prison leaver support for women at risk of chronic homelessness** To help highly vulnerable women who are known to the Complex Lives Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) or who wish to be supported by the Complex Lives MDT, to engage with the range of support services they need, stabilise their lives, progress through a recovery journey and reduce reoffending.	**BCC** NIHE NIPS DoJ	• By September 2026, Complex Lives Process Map and project documentation agreed and initial evaluation complete. • By March 2027, 'plan on a page' developed for those women referred to the complex lives multi-disciplinary team by Hydebank Wood. • (There are no numerical targets for access to the Scheme as it is needs based and to qualify the women must meet the definition of chronic homelessness).		• Improved outcomes and reductions in reoffending for women at risk of chronic homelessness and with experience of the criminal justice system through better communication between service providers and strengthened delivery of complex care plans. • The number of referrals made to Complex Lives Team by Hydebank Wood is being monitored through a recording form and regular meetings between key partners. A full evaluation will be completed at the end of the project.

To reduce Offending

To reduce Reoffending

Outcome 3

Education and Employability

#	Action	Lead / Partners	Milestones and Targets 2026 - 2027	RAG Status	Outcomes: How is it/will it be measured, monitored and evaluated? How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?
8. ↓	**Nurture Group provision** Invest in Nurture provision, to support the attachment-related Social Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing needs of children and young people, which if not addressed can otherwise act as barriers to learning, attendance and achievement.	**DE** EA	• By March 2027 deliver Nurture Group provision in 62 primary schools across NI. Nurture in Education Programme training available to all schools across NI.		• No. of pupils supported through Nurture Group provision. • Number of Nurture in Education Programme (NEP) Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) sessions/staff engaged. • Number of NEP TPL interventions sessions/ staff engaged. • Number of TPL modelling of intervention sessions facilitated with pupils/number of pupils. • Percentage of Nurture group Children showing improved in social, emotional, mental health as measured by the Boxall Profile. • % of Nurture Group children showing improved attendance. • Number of new schools who have engaged with the NEP this term taking and overall total of school. • Following TPL evaluations % of staff who indicated the training was worthwhile. • Following NASS intervention modelling; % of staff indicate that they feel very well equipped/well equipped to deliver the intervention. Reduction in behavioural incidents for participating pupils. • Improved engagement with learning. • Fewer pupils require statutory or other assessments. • Positive attitudes developed to effectively address SBEW barriers to learning. • Schools develop confident parents to support their child's early development and improve child/parent emotional health and well-being / mental health. • Needs of children identified earlier and fewer children and families are reliant on targeted or later interventions as their needs are met through early and preventative provision.

↓ To reduce Offending ↓ To reduce Reoffending



9.	**Safer Schools NI** Provision of an app and web-based platform to provide verified resources to pupils, schools and parents that address pupil safety and promotes wellbeing.	**DE**	• By July 2027 100% of all educational settings in Northern Ireland have access to Safer Schools NI.		• No. of schools/education settings registered with the platform. • No. of pupils engaging with the Digital Proficiency Course (DPC). • No. of parents engaging with the DPC. • Percentage of registered settings engaging with the DPC. • Percentage of registered settings reporting that the platform is easy to use and relevant. • Percentage of schools reporting improved consistency in online safety messaging.
10.	**Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework in Education** Promote a whole school approach to positive emotional health and wellbeing through the delivery of trauma informed training and professional capacity building across schools.	**DE** EA DoH	• By March 2027 a whole school approach is embedded across priority settings. • By March 2027, 100% of post primary schools and EOATS settings engaged with the EWTS project under the Framework. • By March 2027, increase links to services in community through networking and signposting to relevant organisations in statutory and the community and voluntary sectors.		• Increased knowledge and confidence across emotional wellbeing themes, measured using a combination of pre- and post-intervention self-assessment. • Quality assurance feedback on Framework projects. • Strengthened protective factors associated with reduced offending risk.

11.	**PEACEPLUS Youth Programme** Engage young people who are not readily in education, employment or training, and who have historically shown low engagement with other programmes.	**DfE** **DE** TEO SEUPB Voluntary sector partners	• 7,500 young people to complete PEACEPLUS YOUTH Programme by June 2028. • SEUPB will appoint a programme evaluator in 2026 - outcome and impact targets will be developed to inform the Programme Evaluation.		• 77% of all Programme starts to complete the Programme.
12.	**Power to Change campaign** Deliver phase 2 of the Power to Change campaign to challenge harmful cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviours that underpin offending – with a particular focus on younger males and misogyny.	**PSNI** TEO DoJ (Victim Support Division)	• An extension to the first phase of the Power to Change campaign, which successfully targeted unwanted behaviours and attitudes using active bystander in a male demographic aged 25 -54yrs. The phase 2 to target young males age 18+ yrs (minimum for social media reach) with a focus a focus on misogyny, incel culture and the manosphere as well as women on the receiving end of the same - using stats/ factual statements and real lived experiences using a multi-channel approach. • Launch planned for April 2026.		**Campaign platform:** • Effectively communicate and raise awareness of the Power to Change PHASE 2 campaign amongst two key target audience groups: • Younger male audiences to drive behavioural and attitudinal change while giving women voice. • Provide guidance and education to understand healthy relationships. **Digital social media:** • Drive reach amongst target audiences. • Drive positive engagement with the Power to Change campaign. • Drive audiences to a key landing page and/ or platforms to discover more information on VAWAG.

To reduce Offending

To reduce Reoffending

13.	**Through the Gate support** • Work coaches embedded in all prison establishments to provide tailored employability advice and skills development and to link individuals to training and job opportunities.	**DfC** DfC, DoJ	• By March 2027, all prisoners within 13 weeks of release (excluding those on remand) to be offered opportunity to engage with Work Coaches.		• Prisoners have better chances of finding, securing and staying in employment measured by: • Increase in number of appointments arranged with work coaches and; • Increase in participants remaining in employment 6 months post release.
	• **Housing and homelessness** support is provided to those leaving custody, complementing the existing service provided by Housing Rights.	**NIPS/ NIHE/** Housing Rights	• By September 2026, roll out of Custodial Housing Advisor Pilot/NIHE to Magilligan and Hydebank Wood. • Job description developed. • Staff recruited and trained in role. • Staff placed in establishments.		• To prevent homelessness by meeting the accommodation and associated support needs of those entering and leaving custody and reduce the likelihood of re-offending by helping to establish stability in lifestyles of those resettling. • Measured by number of cases where advice and assistance provided to those referred into the service (baseline to be established in year one).
	• **Learning and Skills** Timely assessment of prisoners and access to a curriculum that is broad and balanced and provides opportunities for accreditation and skills development.	**NIPS** Belfast Met, Northwest College	• By 2027, Belfast Met and North West College deliver agreed learning and skills offering across all three prisons.		• Improved educational attainment and skills development, to increase prospects of prisoners finding work on release, measured by: • Percentage of eligible population (those in custody for 30 days or more) who have a Learning and Skills Assessment completed within 30 days of committal. • Percentage of eligible population (those who have a completed Learning and Skills Assessment) who are enrolled on at least one Learning and Skills course. • Percentage of students enrolled on Learning and Skills course who have achieved at least one full Learning and Skills qualification. Monitored through quarterly assessment of performance against performance targets and monitored through Business Manager meetings and Senior Management Board on Learning and Skills.

Outcome 4

Justice and Rehabilitation

#	Action	Lead / Partners	Milestones and Targets 2026 - 2027	RAG Status	Outcomes: How is it/will it be measured, monitored and evaluated? How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?
14. ↓	**Earlier Stage Diversion** Continue to develop and consolidate Earlier Stage Diversion approaches and services across Northern Ireland.	**YJA** DoJ, PPS PSNI, HSCTs VCS	• Implement the recommendations of the QUB evaluation of Children's Diversion Forums by Mar 2026. • Review the Sexting Referral Scheme by September 2026.		• Provision of the completed action plan in response to the recommendations from the evaluation. • Provision of revised guidance to relevant YJA and PSNI staff. • For further detail please refer to the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice 2024 - 2027.
15. ↓	**Another Way - Focused Deterrence** Provide personalised support in South and East Belfast to young people (18-24) disengaging from violent groups or gang related activity (potential/active).	**EPPOC** PSNI EA	• Sustain operational delivery of focused deterrence project across South and East Belfast until end of pilot December 2026. • Increase identification and referral pathways for participants through schools, policing and youth services by December 26. • Contribute data and learning to the ongoing independent evaluation-led by QUB by December 26.		• Number of participants and their introduction to appropriate support pathways. • Analysis of offending behaviour over a two-year window (12 months pre-engagement and 12 months post-engagement) will provide a clear measure of the programme's impact on reducing serious harm and group-related violence. • Outcomes will focus on strengthening protective factors (engagement with services, wellbeing, prosocial networks, education/employment, social skills). • Outcomes will also focus on reducing risk factors (reduced involvement in violent or criminal activity, reduced vulnerability to exploitation). • Stakeholder feedback capturing partnership effectiveness and service quality.

↓ To reduce Offending ↓ To reduce Reoffending



16.	**Aspire** To support young men who are marginalised from communities and at risk of becoming involved in criminal or paramilitary activity. The project is offered on a regional basis.	**PBNI**	**2026 - 31st March 2027** • Deliver Aspire mentoring to 250 referrals p/a - intervention and support to be offered to young men aged 16 -30 who meet the criteria for the Aspire statutory service and for those who are referred into the non-statutory service.[14]		• Intervention is measured via outcome star assessments and service user feedback. • Number of referrals. • Number of people supported. • Number of interventions. • Overall, the intensive intervention will address individual risk factors, and the reported increased stability contributes to a reduction in re-offending rates. • Young men and their families will be better off from the intervention and support they receive. • Intervention and engagement on the project will contribute to a reduction in service users ACE (Assessment, case management and evaluation) scores which is used to assess their likelihood of re-offending.
17.	**Alternatives to custody** • Introduce a bail support scheme for women. • Expand the use of restorative justice interventions. • Complete preparatory work to enable future introduction of the latest GPS-enabled electronic monitoring.	**PBNI** PSNI Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service DOJ Voluntary sector partners	**Bail support** • Implement bail support pilot for women by June 2026 (support element only). • Introduce accommodation by December 2026. • Complete a review of the female pilot by December 2027.		**Bail Support** • 20 women (bail) supported at any one time; support 8 women in safe and suitable housing; retention rates. • Percentage reduction in breaches in Belfast and Ballymena. • Percentage did not commit any further offences whilst on the scheme. • Reoffending rates whilst on the scheme + 1 year after. • Percentage felt supported on mental health, addiction and general/safety needs whilst on the scheme.
			Restorative Justice • Introduce new accreditation process, to expand service providers, by April 2026. • Introduce diversionary disposals, across Northern Ireland, by September 2027. • Review of expansion of service provision by September 2027.		**Restorative Justice** • 175 referrals. • 95% perpetrators and victims contacted within 5 and 10 days. • 90% conferences completed within 25 days. • 75% participation in conference process. • 85% participant satisfaction.

14 Mainstreaming of the project is currently being considered due to funding ending in March 2027. This will impact on the non-statutory element and number.

18.	**Connect in Custody** Embed custody navigators (youth workers) to engage and support 18-25 year-olds in police custody.	**PSNI**	• Initiate pilot in Antrim and Waterside Custody by April 2026. • Pilot to run from April 2026 to end of March 2027. • Maximise number of 'offers of support' to 18-24s in custody. • Final evaluation report in 2028.		• Percentage of participants not re-arrested within 6 and 12 months. • No. of participants entering education, training, or employment. • Self-reported wellbeing scores. • Stakeholder feedback and case studies. • Cost benefit analysis.
19.	**Engage programme** A targeted intervention for women involved in the criminal justice system, helping to develop skills needed to reintegrate into society. It ensures that women are not only supported but empowered to break cycles of harm and reduce their risk of reoffending.	**PBNI**	**2026 - March 2027** • START 360 will deliver the Engage programme in partnership with PBNI to 80 women per annum across the region who meet referral criteria. • Provide 1:1 groupwork support to all women based on SMART Recovery Circle (peer support) to address substance use and poor mental well-being. • All Belfast participants to be offered (ongoing) the Engage Women recovering well programme (8 week sports and healthy living programme). • 30 women per annum (by year end) to be trained in SMART recovery champions training to co-facilitate and provide support to the group.		• Engage measured through: - 80 per annum referral target. • ASI inventory with increase in baseline results as follows: - 60% and above improvement noted in: - medical status - employment status - alcohol use - substance use - family/ social status - psychological wellbeing - improved relationships - improved choices and behaviour. • Gender specific training by Q4 2026. • Guidance for staff working with women Q4 2026. • Enhance lived experience and transition from custody - women's service user group HBW Q4. • Pilot a Probation Services Officer post in PBNI HBW team to enhance transition from custody for women and delivery of 1:1 offence focussed work, referrals to community supports Q3 2026.

To reduce Offending

To reduce Reoffending

Annex 2

Strategic Landscape - Overview of Programmes of Work

Health and Wellbeing

In terms of integrated housing and health solutions, housing stability is a critical enabler of rehabilitation. The Homelessness Strategy, **Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan** (**IDHAP**) and the **Supporting People Programme** play complimentary, but distinct, roles in supporting the accommodation needs of vulnerable people, including prison leavers and care-experienced young people. The **Supporting People Programme** provides supported accommodation and tenancy sustainment services. The NIHE Homelessness Strategy (Ending Homelessness Together) aims to assist people get help before they lose their home, help people access safe and suitable homes and give people the support they need to stay in their home. The **IDHAP** is a complementary rolling plan, focused on non-accommodation interventions that help prevent and address homelessness, such as improving access to health services, strengthening pathways to support.

The **Discharge from Prison** programme is a key opportunity for joined up working to improve prison discharge processes. Rather than creating new or duplicate structures, it offers a ready-made cross-departmental infrastructure to coordinate housing, health, and justice services. This will ensure continuity of medical care and integrated pathways for individuals leaving custody.

In addition, **specialist outreach workers**, funded via the Mental Health Strategy (CAHMS/YJA), are deployed across multiple Health and Social Care Trusts to support young people with chaotic lives and mental health needs, helping to stabilise their circumstances and divert them from criminal pathways.

Advancement of the **Children's Services Reform Programme** will also be critical going forward. The reform of children's social care in Northern Ireland is designed to reduce offending and reoffending by focusing on early intervention, trauma-informed support, and more consistent, regionally integrated services. By addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability, such as adverse childhood experiences, family instability, and lack of timely support, the approach aims to prevent young people from entering the criminal justice system in the first place. Strengthening collaboration between social care and youth justice, improving workforce stability, and ensuring accountability through evidence-based evaluation, all contribute to creating a more effective and preventative approach to youth offending.

Making Life Better (MLB) is the overarching Strategic Framework for public health, focused on primary prevention and addressing the social determinants of health and inequalities. There have been a number of developments in this space, including the new Neighbourhood Model of Care. Under the Framework, a number of strategies and action plans help improve population health and wellbeing and target prominent health inequalities, which can help to reduce offending and reoffending.

The **Mental Health Strategy** (2021–2031) and associated **delivery plan** includes 35 actions across prevention, crisis support, and service reform. Mental health issues are a significant driver of offending, especially among vulnerable populations. By improving access to mental health services, embedding trauma-informed care, and enhancing crisis response, the strategy aims to improve wellbeing and resilience; provide earlier intervention; ensure access to the right care at the right time; and provide better outcomes for those with severe/complex mental illness. Delivery of the strategy should help reduce the number of people entering the criminal justice system on account of unmet mental health needs.

The **Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery – Substance Use Strategy** (2021-2031) addresses addiction - a key factor in offending behaviour - through prevention, harm reduction, and recovery services. It includes EPPOC-funded work on Drug Related Intimidation (DRI) and offender rehabilitation. Its impact includes reducing drug-related offences, supporting recovery to prevent relapses and reoffending and targeted interventions at young people most at risk of substance use, including children and young people with lived experience of care.

The **Online Safety Strategy**, and accompanying Action Plans, have been developed with the vision that all children and young people enjoy the educational, social and economic benefits of the online world, and that they are empowered to do this safely, knowledgably, and without fear.

The **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** (2024-2031) addresses the root causes of domestic and/or sexual abuse; ensuring that those affected get the right support at the right time; and that individuals who are abusive are held to account.

Promoting Positive Relationships Programme (PPRP) is a structured intervention initiative within PBNI. It is designed to address offending behaviour, particularly in the context of domestic abuse and interpersonal violence. The programme is part of a broader strategy to reduce reoffending and promote behavioural change through evidence-based interventions.

Community and Inclusion

Strong, inclusive communities are essential for prevention and recovery.

NICS Collaboration Test and Learn is an NICS Board based initiative to test better ways of placed-based working through collaboration across government and with communities.

The **Together: Building a United Community Strategy**, including the **Urban Villages** approach, is designed to improve good relations outcomes and to help develop thriving places where there has previously been a history of deprivation and community tension. A community-informed and area-based approach promotes good relations through urban regeneration and cross-community partnerships addressing shared challenges. Plans are underway to expand the Urban Villages model through UV2, bringing its benefits to new areas and embedding lessons from recent Test and Learn pilots.

Communities in Transition supports neighbourhoods most affected by paramilitary influence to increase resilience and safety.

The **Supporting People Programme** provides housing-related support to vulnerable individuals (including young people, people experiencing homelessness, older people and disabled people), promoting independence and inclusion to support positive change and, where relevant, rehabilitation.

The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls **(EVAWG)** Strategic Framework advances prevention and early intervention to tackle gender-based violence, abuse and harm along with the attitudes and behaviours that fuel future offending. This Framework will move into its second delivery phase, continuing prevention and early intervention measures to deepen cultural change.

The **Youth Raising Aspirations Programme** – young people growing up in areas affected by paramilitary activity and criminality often face limited opportunities and heightened risks of exploitation. This Programme is designed to change that trajectory. It works directly with young people to broaden their horizons, build confidence, and show that there are positive alternatives to crime. Through mentoring, skills development, and pathways into education and employment, the programme helps young people make informed choices about their future. By reducing vulnerability to paramilitary recruitment and criminal networks, it plays a vital role in breaking the cycle of offending before it begins.

A refreshed **Good Relations Framework** will also be introduced, modernising our approach to promoting tolerance, diversity, and shared spaces.

These developments will ensure that Northern Ireland continues to make progress in reducing offending and reoffending, creating safer, more cohesive communities for everyone.

Education and Employability

A whole-school approach to emotional health and wellbeing is being embedded through the **Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework**, creating welcoming and respectful school communities. This is complemented by Nurture provision (Nurture Groups and the Nurture in Education Programme), Nurturing environments have an important role in healthy brain and emotional development in children, and in that context nurturing interventions in schools are crucial for children, particularly those with attachment-related Social Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing needs, which if not addressed can otherwise act as barriers to learning, attendance and achievement. There are multiple sources that highlight the relationship between school attendance and academic achievement and the likelihood of interacting with the criminal justice system.

Nurture Groups aim to address the individual needs of children with SBEW challenges, who have often experienced significant trauma in life and / or who have attachment-related challenges, with a view to developing their ability to engage with adults and their peers and to enable them to return to and re-integrate effectively within their mainstream class and better to engage with learning. The Education Authority also offers support to all schools to improve the educational, social, emotional and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people within a whole school nurture approach framework through its Nurture in Education Programme (NEP). NEP is an early intervention and preventative framework that embeds whole school nurturing approaches and ethos within schools, with a view to developing children's resilience and capacity to respond more confidently to challenges.

The **A Life Deserved** strategy is designed to improve the lives of children and young people who are in care, at risk of entering care, or recently left care and outlines commitments such as, increasing specialist support in residential and foster settings, and enhancing early intervention for those at risk.

Complementing this, the **Connecting Care Framework** delivers integrated therapeutic care, ensuring consistent trauma-informed support across education and care environments, which fosters resilience and reduces vulnerability to risk behaviours. By providing stable, emotionally supportive, and academically enriched environments, the continuum of support aims to close the attainment gap and address early-life adversity, thereby diminishing pathways leading to criminal behaviour.

Tackling Educational Disadvantage - Through programmes and initiatives such as Targeting Social Need, Extended Schools, the RAISE Programme, Sure Start and a range of other programmes, the Department of Education will continue to address educational inequalities and close the gap.

The **Raising Achievement to Improve School Engagement (RAISE) Programme** is a place-based approach in 18 localities across Northern Ireland that aims to tackle educational disadvantage through community and voluntary organisations working effectively with educational settings in a whole-community approach. Strategic Area Plans for each Locality, published on 5 September 2025, set objectives to promote equality of opportunity for those at risk of exclusion and under-achievement. The Plans will be delivered through Locality Led Projects with the aim of improving, for example, literacy, numeracy, digital skills, attendance and wellbeing. Through early interventions, wellbeing support, and inclusive education RAISE will help to reduce risk factors linked to crime. Improved school engagement and attainment foster resilience, reduce marginalisation, and create pathways to positive life outcomes, key protective factors against offending.

'Children Looked After in Education' – in-school support as required to ensure care-experienced children and young people in education can access tailored interventions to meet their educational needs which will help to reduce risks that can lead to offending and promote positive life outcomes.

Careers pathways are being strengthened through the joint **Careers Action Plan 2025-2028** to improve access to information, advice and routes into employment. Delivery under this plan aims to develop careers services and how they are delivered to people of all ages, which may have positive outcomes for those at risk of offending and reoffending. We will continue to embed restorative practice in education settings to maintain engagement and reduce criminalisation of vulnerable learners. Together, these measures improve attainment, aspiration and progression, lowering the risks associated with offending.

Further projects are also progressing under the PEACEPLUS Shared Learning Together and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing programmes; the former focusing on providing high quality shared education experiences for children and young people from diverse backgrounds through cross-community and cross-border partnerships across both the formal and non-formal education sectors, while the latter specifically addresses mental health and wellbeing needs for young people aged 9-25 which can present barriers to educational achievement. Within the flagship PEACEPLUS ASPIRE shared learning programme, around 580 schools/settings are currently being supported in 2025/26, with approximately 43% serving highly disadvantaged communities across both jurisdictions.

Restorative practice, as an alternative to disciplinary measures such as suspension and expulsion, is also being promoted in schools. This approach encourages relational practice and accountability, helping to maintain young people's connection to education and reduce the likelihood of criminal justice system involvement.

Justice and Rehabilitation

It is important that within a justice and rehabilitation context that accountability, change and reintegration are promoted. Credible, structured alternatives to custody and high-quality rehabilitation and resettlement are important in order to reduce reoffending and strengthen public confidence.

The **Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC)** is an evidence-based, outcomes-focused, whole of government approach to addressing paramilitarism and organised crime. It currently invests around £16m per annum in projects aimed at building safer, more resilient communities. EPPOC is jointly funded by the NI Executive and UK Government. This funding is due to end in March 2027.

Using a public health approach to violence and harm prevention, EPPOC directly contributes to reducing offending and reoffending through primary interventions (including public awareness campaigns and extensive work in communities); secondary interventions for those at risk of harm (including targeted youth work); and tertiary interventions (including support for those leaving the criminal justice system).

EPPOC has developed an extensive evidence base on 'what works' to address paramilitarism, organised crime, serious youth violence and trauma through it's action research contract. Research is also being undertaken on the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among prisoners, in order to shape rehabilitation strategies and ensure that interventions address the root causes of offending.

Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) is a collaborative arrangement between DoJ, PSNI, PBNI, YJA and NIPS. The purpose of ROP is to bring a multi-agency approach to crime and reoffending, focussing on the most persistent and prolific people who have offended, identified jointly by partners to reduce risk and likelihood of re-offending, informed by evidence-based best practice.

The PSNI **Crime Prevention Strategy (Prevention First)** places the prevention of crime at the very heart of daily policing business and plays a key role in ensuring that a victim focused, responsive, visible and accessible policing service is delivered. The delivery of this 'Prevention First' strategy focuses on early intervention and engagement, enhancing safer communities and reducing harm for the vulnerable.

The **Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI**) fulfils a statutory role in assessing, supervising, and rehabilitating people subject to court orders or post custodial licences. Through structured community supervision (including Probation Orders, Community Service Orders, Combination Orders and Enhanced Combination Orders (ECOs), as well as licence supervision), PBNI works to address the causes of offending, manage risk, and protect the public. Its programmes and interventions target individual offending-related needs, supporting behaviour change, reducing reoffending, lowering victimisation, and contributing to safer communities.

Restorative practice is a powerful approach that brings those who have caused harm together with those affected by their actions. Evidence shows that restorative approaches reduce reoffending, improve victim satisfaction, and strengthen community trust in the criminal justice system. By addressing harm in a constructive way, restorative practice helps individuals reintegrate into society and reduces the likelihood of future offending.

Restorative Justice (Adult Diversionary Scheme) – under the **2022 – 2027 Adult Restorative Justice Strategy**, a new accreditation process is being introduced for the provision of restorative justice services in the criminal justice system, focused on the use of restorative justice conferences. Over 2026 and 2027, this will focus on diversionary disposals, where a case would otherwise be on the cusp of prosecution. More generally, the strategy aims to expand the use of restorative interventions across all stages of the criminal justice system. This scheme was funded by EPPOC up to March 2026.

There is also continued commitment to early intervention, restorative practices, and tailored support for young people in contact with the criminal justice system. This emphasises a child-centred approach to address underlying causes of offending. By promoting diversionary measures and enhancing community-based services, this can prevent young people from entering into, or escalating within, the criminal justice system.

There is also a focus on diverting children away from the formal criminal justice system at an earlier stage, including a new diversionary disposal that prevents the long-term consequences of early justice involvement. The Youth Justice Agency's commitment to becoming trauma-informed, alongside its partnership with CAMHS, ensures that children's emotional and mental health needs are addressed. Strengthening links with education, training, and employment providers supports reintegration and reduces the risk of reoffending by offering meaningful pathways forward.

The **Children's Diversion Forums (CDFs)** aims to divert young people from the formal criminal justice system at the earliest opportunity, identifying support needs and linking children to appropriate services. They have played a vital role in reducing offending and reoffending by identifying children at risk early and connecting them to appropriate support services before they enter the formal criminal justice system.

Annex 3

Glossary of Terms

Term	Meaning
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
DE	Department of Education
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for the Economy
DoH	Department of Health
DoJ	Department of Justice
EA	Education Authority
EPPOC	Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime
HBW	Hydebank Wood Women's Prison
HSCTs	Health and Social Care Trusts
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
QUB	Queens University Belfast
SBEW	Social, Behavioural, Emotional, and Wellbeing
SEUPB	Special EU Programmes Board
TEO	The Executive Office
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
NEP	Nurture in Education Programme
NIACRO	Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIPS	Northern Ireland Prison Service
YJA	Youth Justice Agency