



Geraldine Hanna
Commissioner Designate for
Victims of Crime
Block 4, Knockview Building
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SJ

Rt. Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
Erskine House
20-32 Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4GF

9th February 2023

Dear Mr Heaton-Harris,

Challenges facing the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System

I am writing to you as the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime in Northern Ireland, which requires me to provide a voice for all victims of crime and review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice.

As you meet today with Northern Ireland political parties regarding the budget issues facing Northern Ireland, I wanted to highlight the needs of victims of crime and some of the challenges that I see that our facing our justice system.

For many years now the justice system has been the poor relation when it has come to the allocation of funding across departments.

The funding challenges facing Northern Ireland criminal justice system are deeply concerning and threaten to undermine public and victim confidence in the rule of law. The Chief Constable has recently highlighted that the cuts facing the PSNI will reduce and slow his ability to tackle crime. This is at a time of rising crime and significant backlogs in our court system, which have only been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In November 2022, the then Justice Minister Naomi Long was reporting that without the additional monies that had been found to help address the backlog (now due to run out in March), that the Northern Ireland courts are projected to have worked through the backlog by 2028. The most recent statistical bulletin from the PPS



highlights that it is taking an average of 208 days for an indictable prosecution decision in the Crown Court

We made many positive steps forward in the last, albeit reduced, mandate by introducing a range of new measures to help support victims, particularly victims of domestic and sexual violence. Efforts by all over the last few decades have, I believe, contributed to the increased reporting that we see of these types of crime. Very often though, these legislative changes require our criminal justice agencies to do more without the associated increase in resources.

Doing more with less is not sustainable and will inevitably lead to cuts being made in some areas of victim care to enable the effective implementation of new initiatives and laws. I recognise that additional funding is not sufficient to address the challenges facing the system but I am concerned that continued reductions is hampering the ability to progress the necessary reforms needed to improve the performance of the system.

In the autumn budget of 2021, the UK Government invested billions in the justice system in England and Wales with funding being allocated to address the backlog, improve waiting times for victims of crime and to support proposed reform programmes. I would ask that additional funding considerations should be extended to Northern Ireland, especially in light of today's news that we may potentially be without a government until January 2024.

I am more than happy to meet with you to discuss this issue or any aspect of my work further.

Kind Regards,

Geraldine Hanna
Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime