



**COMMISSIONER
FOR VICTIMS
OF CRIME**

Commissioner for Victims of
Crime Office Northern Ireland

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

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FOREWORD

2024/25 was a milestone year for my office. For one thing, it was in 2024/25 that I published the results of our first ever victim survey.

My office exists to amplify the voices of victims to drive positive change. Surveys are not the only way to capture victim's voices, but they are an important aspect of it.

More than that, our survey is the only one in Northern Ireland that captures views of victims of all crime, providing a unique insight into the experience of victims that is not available in any of the other victim surveys carried out in Northern Ireland.

The views and experiences of victims were further evidenced throughout the year through some key research pieces published by my office. The study into male victims of intimate partner violence undertaken by STARC in Queen's University Belfast, is one such example. It gives us an insight into the experience of victims who face a unique stigma in coming forward to seek help.

This research demonstrates the need for action to better support male victims and I was pleased that both the Ministers of Health and Justice spoke at the report launch, showing the cross-cutting nature of the response required to address this issue. Such work not only helps evidence the need but also shines a light on the issue raising public awareness and understanding. I was heartened therefore to hear that several organisations saw an increase in calls from male victims after seeing media coverage of our report.

I have no doubt that there is much more work to be done in encouraging male victims of intimate partner violence to come forward and seek help and ensuring that when they do that the appropriate services are available for them. I am hoping therefore to publish the findings of a mapping exercise to identify services available to male victims of domestic abuse in the months ahead.

One of the most fundamental places where the voices of victims should be heard is within our court process and I welcomed the response from the Department of Justice and the wider criminal justice system to our research into Victim Personal Statements (VPS). These are a vital tool for victim empowerment but will only achieve the intended benefits for victims if victims are aware of their existence and are able to access them in any case.

It is encouraging that the relevant agencies are working to increase the accessibility and awareness of this process and I am particularly delighted that the Justice Minister has indicated her support to legislate to ensure that victims can have the option to read their VPS aloud in court. In so doing, we help ensure greater understanding of the impact of the crime and ensure greater recognition of victims' rights in the process.



I am also pleased that the Justice Minister has now consulted, following the publication of my research into the issue, on changes to the disclosure of victim's third party material.

Making changes to the disclosure of victim's third party material was something I identified early on as a strategic objective. The fact that this is now progressing is a very positive sign. It is through the introduction of legislation that better protects and supports victims of crime that our government can help evidence to the public their often-cited commitment to victims of crime.

These are just some of the positives I have seen over the last year, however one of the major sources of frustration in this role is the pace at which we move to implement identified solutions. Slow decision making or sluggish progress often exacerbates the problem, signals complacency and erodes victims' confidence. Our efforts to reduce delay in the justice system is a key example of this.

Avoidable delay continues to plague our criminal justice system having a devastating impact on victims and witnesses. I am pleased that the Justice Department have been successful in securing money from the transformation fund which aims to support necessary work in this area however the success will only truly be achieved if agencies are able to move at pace to deliver this.

Given the importance of this issue I am disappointed and dismayed to note that despite the best efforts of all involved, the limited progress made on this issue has effectively been negated due to the full withdrawal of services by the Criminal Bar Association in January and February of 2025. As we publish this report, the CBA continue to refuse instructions on certain serious crimes due to be heard in the crown court. This action will further negatively impact on victims and witnesses as well as raising concerns about public protection. Regardless of the rights and wrongs, the arguments on both sides, it is victims who will ultimately pay the price.

Since devolution, our justice system has continued to be underfunded and the issues underpinning this action can to some degree be attributed to this. If we are to, in any way, be able to deliver against our Programme for Government commitments to have safe communities and end violence against women and girls we must sufficiently invest in our justice system. I have outlined above how legislation can demonstrate government's commitment to victims. This mechanism is only part of the picture however and improved legislation will be rendered meaningless if the system itself is broken.

It is government's responsibility to keep people safe, they must therefore ensure the system to enable that is sufficiently funded to do so!

And when identifying what resources are needed to ensure the justice system is sufficiently funded to meet the needs of victims of crime, we must stop the tendency to view the services provided by the community and voluntary sector as 'nice to haves' but instead recognise the absolutely vital role that these organisations play.

It is clear from my engagement with victims that the tailored and specialised support that victims receive from a range of services plays a vital role in not only their 'recovery' but also their continued support and engagement in a criminal justice outcome.

In times of financial constraints, it is such services that are the first to suffer and very often feel the impact of funding cuts more acutely than our statutory services. It is essential to recognise their role as an integral element of a fair and effective justice system.

In summary, 2024-25 has been a year of milestones, successes and frustration.

One of the things I have most enjoyed about this role so far is the collaborative nature of my work. I have been grateful for the support of the criminal justice organisations, the legal profession, government departments, the Justice Minister and her Executive colleagues, MLA's from across the political spectrum, especially the members of the Justice Committee, and of course, the community and voluntary sector and my advisory panels.

But above all, it has been a year when I have been humbled consistently by the number of victims who have had the courage to come forward and trust me with their stories.

This office was founded to help amplify their voices, to use their power to make positive change. Every milestone is another step to a system those victims deserve, every success is due to those victims coming forward and every frustration is motivation to push on and do more to do justice to those who have put their trust in me and this office.

I look forward to the year ahead.



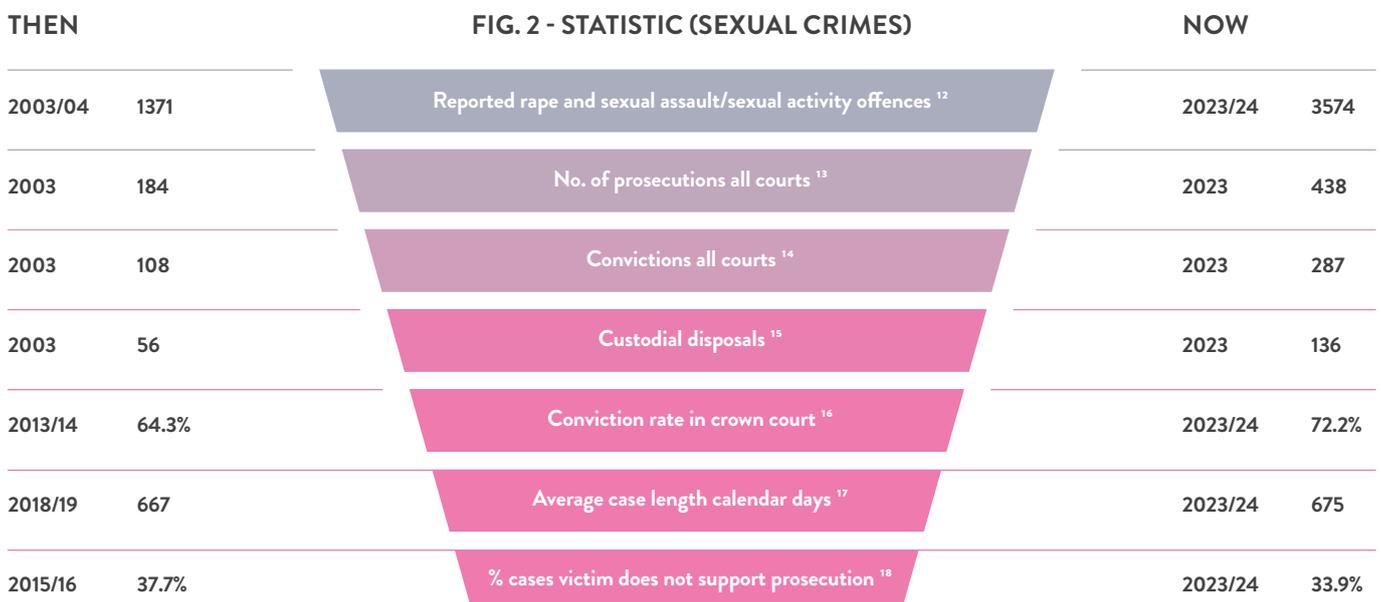
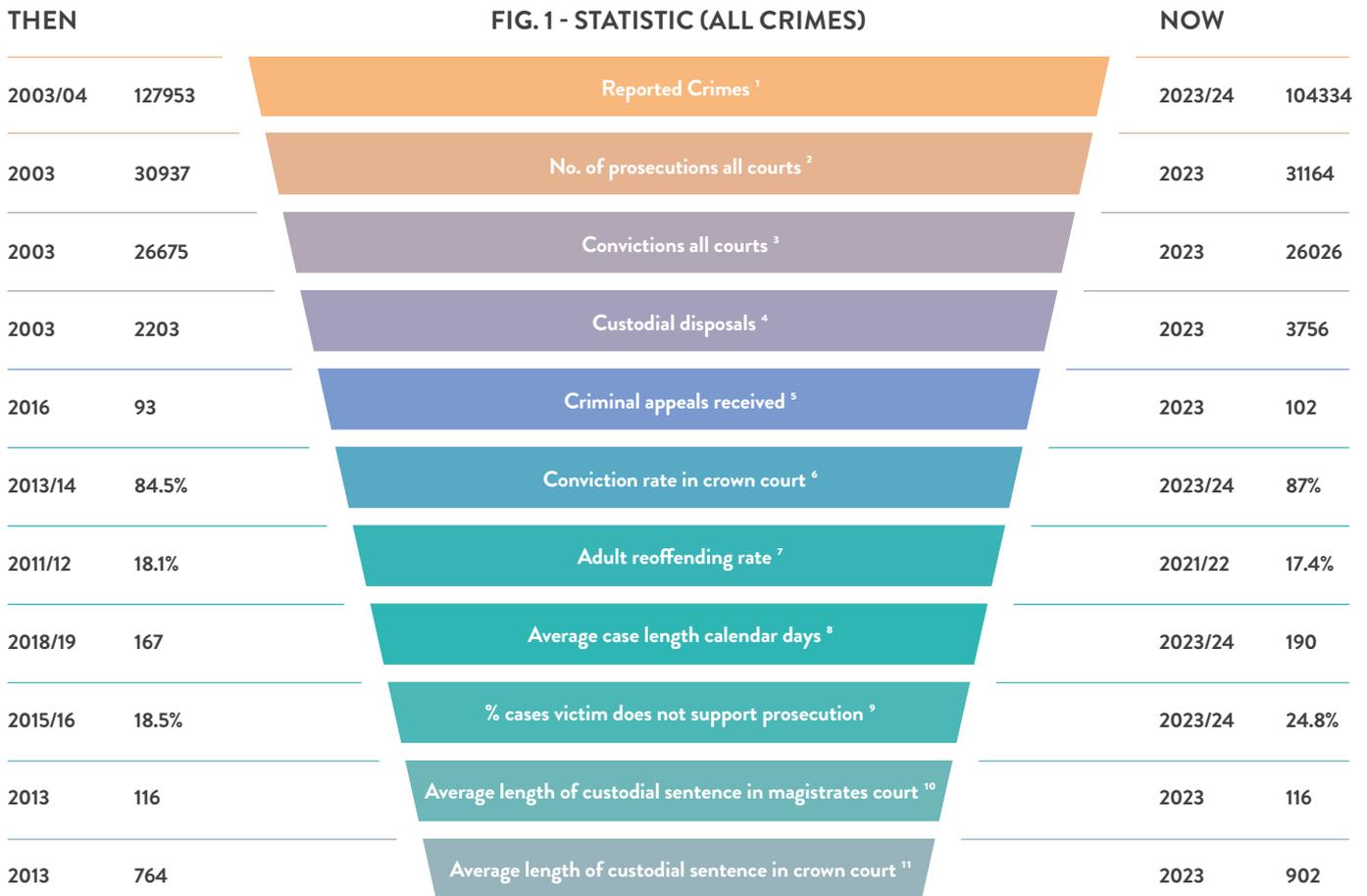
It is through the introduction of legislation that better protects and supports victims of crime that our government can help evidence to the public their often-cited commitment to victims of crime.



THE WORLD WE WORK IN

Since taking up this role in June 2022, I have highlighted the need for the better collection and use of data across the criminal justice system.

The difference in how and when organisations in the criminal justice system collect and publish data means it can be difficult to get a clear picture of our criminal justice system as a whole or the journey of an individual throughout the process.



What I have tried to do in Fig 1 and Fig 2, is look at some key metrics which affect victims across a span of time using the statistics that are available. For some statistics that means looking at a change over twenty years, for others it means looking at a change over seven.

This is not ideal but putting this data in one place is helpful in creating a picture of the key issues that victims have brought to my office. As is so often the case with statistics, these infographics also raise questions as much as answer them.

For instance, while there has been a significant decrease in the total number of crimes committed, the number of prosecutions has not changed significantly in the last two decades.

The total number of crimes only tells part of the story and it is important to investigate these figures a little more closely to gain a true understanding of the experience of victims of crime in Northern Ireland.

Over the same time as the total number of crimes reported to police has dropped by around 20,000, the number of sexual crimes reported to the police has almost trebled.

This is significant because it has a major impact on how our criminal justice system must act, and the complexity of needs that such victims will be presenting with. The types of trials that are coming through our courts are different now to what they were 20 years ago and I am yet to be convinced that the system as a whole has sufficiently responded to that change.

The complexity and seriousness of the crimes coming through our system may also be reflected in the fact that while reported crimes are going down, the number of prosecutions and convictions are around the same level, while the number of custodial disposals are on the rise. At a cursory glance this may look like a more “tough on crime” attitude but it could also be explained by the changing nature of the crimes reported and prosecuted.

In trying to understand the level of confidence victims have in the criminal justice system to bring offenders to justice, we can look at the percentage of cases where victims did not support further action. For victims of all crimes the figure has risen from 18.5% seven years ago, to 24.8% in 2023/24. For victims of sexual crime the figure has dropped from 37.7% to 33.9%.

While the trend for victims of sexual crime is obviously positive and many of us will hope has been assisted by focused efforts in this area particularly post the Gillen review, our system cannot report on the reasons why. It also remains shocking that over a third of victims of sexual crime, who have reported the crime,

do not support further action. Given what we know about the under-reporting of sexual crime, the true number of victims who are not seeking a criminal justice outcome will be much higher than we know.

That forces us to ask the question – why?

Seeking a criminal justice outcome or not is an intensely personal decision, one unique to each victim. What I have heard from many victims I have engaged with is that the issue of delay was a factor. The length of time it takes for cases to get through our court system is atrocious and hasn't gotten better despite everyone knowing that it's a problem and ostensible efforts to address it.

For all crime types the average time it takes for a trial to get through the system is 190 days compared to 167 in 2018/19. For victims of sexual violence the average is 675 days compared to 667 in 2018/19. 675 days is just shy of two years. And this is the average where far too many are taking even longer than this. There are undoubtedly individual victims of sexual crime whose cases first came to court when I started this role, who are still going through the court process.

We cannot think of delay as an abstract issue, it is destroying people's lives, it is freezing individuals in time and actively harming them.

The question also arises of what happens to offenders who are convicted. When perpetrators are brought to trial and sentenced for their crime, their re-offending rate is a vitally important statistic to understand how effective our system is at preventing future harm.

The reoffending rate for adults is down slightly, but it is worrying that almost a fifth of those convicted of a crime go on to reoffend again within one year.

Data is a powerful tool – when it is used correctly. It is an issue of existential importance for the criminal justice system that more is done to capture, analyse and use victim-centred data to make improvements for victims.

¹ Official Statistics | PSNI. ² Provided by DoJ. ³ Provided by DoJ. ⁴ Provided by DoJ. ⁵ NICTS Judicial Statistics | Department of Justice.

⁶ Statistics and Research | Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. ⁷ R & S bulletin 18/2014 adult reoffending in Northern Ireland |

Department of Justice. ⁸ Prosecution and Conviction Statistics | Department of Justice. ⁹ Official Statistics | PSNI: ¹⁰ Provided by DoJ.

¹¹ Provided by DoJ. ¹² Official Statistics | PSNI. ¹³ Provided by DoJ. ¹⁴ Provided by DoJ ¹⁵ Provided by DoJ. ¹⁶ Statistics and Research |

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. ¹⁷ Prosecution and Conviction Statistics | Department of Justice. ¹⁸ Official Statistics | PSNI



ENGAGING WITH VICTIMS

Quantitative data provides valuable insights, enabling us to monitor performance and identify trends.

Behind these statistics are unique and uniquely harmed individuals, who have their own stories to tell.

Engaging directly with victims allows me to hear those stories, understand the real-life impact of crime and our criminal justice system and give meaning to the quantitative data.

In 2024/25 I had 29 face-to-face meetings with victims of crime. The types of crimes that these individuals were victims of ranged from murder, domestic and sexual abuse, hate crime through to financial crime such as fraud.

Many of these victims had engaged with various stakeholders within the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland including;

- Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI);
- Public Prosecution Service (PPS);
- Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS);
- Members of the Judiciary;
- Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI);
- The Parole Commissioners and;
- Probation Service for Northern Ireland (PBNI)

No victim ever has ever come to me with just one issue. Below I have included a list showing the most common complaint themes identified following engagement with victims.

The PPS and the PSNI are the “front facing” parts of our justice system, most interaction victims have is with those agencies and for many their journey did not proceed past the decision to prosecute stage. It is therefore unsurprising that it is these agencies about whom I hear the most.

The following list provides an indication of the issues raised most frequently with my office. It should be noted that this does not represent every issue raised but rather the most frequent themes arising from victim meetings.

- 1 NICTS – Issue with family courts
- 2 PSNI – failure to investigate/capture all evidence
- 3 PSNI – poor communication
- 4 PSNI – lack of updates
- 5 PSNI – change in investigating officers
- 6 Judiciary – unhappy with how treated or spoken to
- 7 PPS – Unhappy with decision on prosecution

Victims have also highlighted difficulties with stakeholders outside of the criminal justice system, including health, education, housing and local government.



Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime Geraldine Hanna with DoJ Permanent Secretary Hugh Widdis.

PUBLISHED RESEARCH

Research provides a solid evidence base for my office to make a compelling argument for change.

MALE EXPERIENCE OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

October 2024 – Report launched into physical and psychological impact of IPV on male victims in NI.

The report found male experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a major issue that requires immediate attention.

The report can be read on our website [here](#).



INAUGURAL VICTIM SURVEY RESULTS

September 2024 - Results of the inaugural victim survey carried out by my office were published. This survey is the only one open to victims of all crime.

The findings of the survey can be [read here](#) and I described them at the time of publication as an “SOS from victims of crime.”

VICTIM PERSONAL STATEMENTS

October 2024 – Published *Victim Personal Statements NI – Policy vs Practice* a study on how effectively the VPS is being used across our justice system.

More needs to be done to make sure the VPS fulfils its potential as a vital tool for victim empowerment and engagement.

Key recommendations included the need to increase accessibility for VPS and need for legislative change to give victims the right to read their VPS out in court if they chose to do so.

I am very pleased that the Justice Minister has committed to exploring this issue.

WORK ONGOING

FAMILY COURTS

I have commissioned the Centre for Children's Rights in Queen's University Belfast to carry out a significant piece of research into children's experience of family courts, with the terms of reference informed by young people from the SAY project.

Victims engaging with my office highlight:

- Lack of connection between civil and criminal proceedings
- Perceived pro-contact culture
- Issues accessing legal representation

The research will explore how victims, survivors and children experience participation in family courts when there has been domestic violence in the family and how their participation can be made better.

I have also had the opportunity to engage with members of the judiciary about the issue of family courts and the work in England and Wales around the "Pathfinder Courts" approach being taken there. This engagement has included addressing family court judges at an event hosted by the Lady Chief Justice and hosting a roundtable discussion with Agenda NI which can be read here.



Participants in the Agenda NI Roundtable on family courts Gráinne Murphy, Her Honour Judge Gaynor Lloyd, The Right Honourable Sir John Gillen, Geraldine Hanna and Edel McKenna.

NMO'S AND OO'S

I have commissioned research to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the application, granting and perceived effectiveness of non-molestation and occupation orders across Northern Ireland between 2016 and 2024.

Victims and support agencies engaging with my office have raised concerns about NMO's including:

- inconsistencies across the region in the application, granting and monitoring of these orders
- the effectiveness of these orders in protecting victims from further harm
- the response of the system when these orders are breached



The Commissioner Designate with the Lady Chief Justice Dame Siobhan Keegan.

Cursory analysis of the numbers of applications made and granted over the last eight years indicate a downward trend in both the application and granting of these orders and significant variations across court areas.

This is despite the fact that the number of domestic abuse cases are on the rise. More work needs to be done to understand what is underpinning these trends.

I want to understand if these protection orders are fit for purpose and addressing the needs identified when first introduced into law.

SECOND VICTIM SURVEY

My office undertook its second victims' survey in 2024/25. As with the inaugural survey, this was conducted online and developed to capture the experiences victims of all types of crime have had with the criminal justice system.

The survey went live on 23 September 2024 and closed on 23 December 2024.

A total of 257 responses were received, which represents a significant increase in the number of responses received in 2023/24.

Responses to these surveys provide a unique insight into the real experiences of victims of crime and help to inform my priorities in championing victims' rights and perspectives.

Responses are currently being collated and analysed. Findings will be published on my website later this year. Collaboration is also underway with the Department of Justice and relevant criminal justice agencies to establish a comprehensive and collective process to capture the views and experiences of victims across the system.



The Commissioner Designate with Deirdre Hargey MLA and Ciara Ferguson MLA, members of the Justice Committee.

PUSHING FOR CHANGE

Beyond major pieces of research this office plays an important role in driving forward positive changes for victims of crime through influencing policy.

My team and I have met with a range of stakeholders throughout 2024/25 to highlight the needs of victims of crime and ensure their voices are amplified.

DISCLOSURE OF THIRD PARTY MATERIAL

The unnecessary disclosure of private information such as counselling records, is a major issue affecting victims of crime, particularly victims of sexual crime.

My report **“A Second Assault – the impact of third party disclosure practices on victims of sexual abuse in Northern Ireland” [November 2023]**, called for new legislation to protect the privacy rights of victims and better adherence to current safeguards.

To take forward the latter recommendation, I convened a Task and Finish Working Group with representatives from the PPS, PSNI, Bar of NI, Law Society NI, DoJ, NICTS, LCJO and the ICO.

As noted in A Second Assault, it is through legislative change that victims will feel a real benefit, with new laws needed to afford victims the privacy rights they deserve.

This has been a key area of focus for my office over the past year.

In the course of 2024/25, and thanks to the work of this office, the Minister of Justice has consulted on proposals to introduce significant changes to the process for the disclosure of third party material in the Victims and Witnesses Bill due to be introduced in 2026.

NO FILE DECISION PILOT

In November 2023 PSNI and PPS began a pilot operating model which means that police are no longer required to submit all files to PPS where a no prosecution recommendation is made for each of the suspects in the case. The PPS continue to take decisions in serious cases where the PSNI have recommended no prosecution.

My office has continued to play an important role providing feedback.

Any efforts to speed up justice are welcome, however, all parties are agreed that speeding up the system must not in any way compromise the quality of the process of decision making on cases.

The joint interim evaluation of the pilot carried out by the PSNI and PPS has been broadly positive, however, further work is required on victim feedback as part of the evaluation, which needs to be taken forward.

One of the most important things that the PPS and PSNI must remain alive to, is the potential impact on domestic abuse cases in particular.



PAROLE

It's really important that first and foremost victims understand our parole process and that when decisions are taken about parole, we are doing everything possible to make sure the victims are given a choice about providing an input as appropriate.

There is a lot more to be done to make sure people are aware of their legislative right to provide statements at parole hearings.

So far there have been only two individuals who have requested to make these statements and only one whose request has been approved.

Further work is needed to ensure that the impact of parole decisions are considered and their voices heard.

COURT TRANSCRIPTS

In an ideal world, all victims of crime would be able to freely access an audio record of what happened in court if they wished to receive it. This can not only help with understanding of the trial proceedings, particularly if they were unable to attend, but also sends a clear message of their role in the justice process.

Whilst affordability should not be the only considered factor, I have encouraged senior decision makers in the criminal justice system to actively explore digital solutions that would make transcripts available at an acceptable cost to the public purse.

In the interim, I have suggested that victims should have free access to sentencing remarks made by judges, and have flagged this issue at the Lady Chief Justice's Sentencing Group, particularly for cases involving a fatality.

The Department of Justice is currently exploring this issue and has set up a working group to see how improvements could be made.

'GOOD CHARACTER' REFERENCES

The use of good character references, particularly at sentencing stage, is an issue that has been raised to me by a number of victims and has received media attention across the island of Ireland over the last year.

This is an issue that especially affects victims of sexual crime and domestic abuse.

I will continue to engage with key stakeholders and lobby to remove their use at sentencing stage.

HATE CRIME

Following a spate of racially motivated hate crimes in summer 2024, I called a for a 'rapid review' into those events to understand what happened, who was responsible and what can be done as part of a medium-term policy response.

I worked with the Chair of the Executive Committee in Stormont to advise her on a motion, which was passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in the autumn of 2024 calling for such a review to take place.

I have also written to the First and Deputy First Minister to encourage them to implement such a review.

Work continues in my office to identify learning from those events and provide advice to decision makers.



The Commissioner Designate with the Chair of the Executive Committee Paula Bradshaw, Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee Connie Egan and the Clerk of the Executive Committee Nick Mitford.

SENTENCING

During my time in this role I have been alive to the increasing levels of discourse and varying confidence levels around sentencing.

There is a lack of understanding amongst the general public when it comes to sentencing, particularly the processes involved in community sentencing and automatic release provisions.

There is a strong perception amongst many victims and the wider public that sentencing in Northern Ireland is more lenient than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Minister of Justice has indicated her intention to introduce a Sentencing Bill to the Assembly in the autumn of 2025.

Throughout the year, I have engaged with the Department of Justice and the judiciary to try and identify changes that could be made to address some of these concerns.

One of the big areas of focus is the “early guilty plea” scheme, whereby perpetrators can have their sentence reduced by pleading guilty before the case goes to trial.

The levels of reductions that may be given right up until the day of trial is not often clear and often greater than those given in England and Wales, creating a strong perception that sentences here are more lenient. Another important issue raised by victims with regards to sentencing is the perception that sentences handed down in Northern Ireland are simply shorter than elsewhere and often do not match the severity of the crime committed.

I welcome the fact that the Minister has recognised this issue and committed to consulting on it with a view to making changes. Outside of this, I believe that there is greater work needed to both increase the public understanding of sentencing and how it works as well as ensuring that any sentence undertaken by an offender in or outside of prison is appropriately resourced with clearly demonstrated benefits for public protection and recidivism.

A STEEP LEARNING CURVE

Understanding the experience of victims of domestic abuse when navigating their way through the civil legal system is vitally important if we are to understand how to make sure that system works for those victims.

A Steep Learning Curve, which was commissioned by the Department of Justice following engagement with my office, is a review and rapid priority setting exercise of civil legal aid for cases of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

This is an important step and can it can be read here.



The Commissioner Designate with Amanda Stewart, Chief Executive of the Probation Board for NI.



The Commissioner Designate
with Paul Frew MLA in Stormont.

ASYLUM SEEKERS HOUSING

I met with representatives from the Law Centre NI and Rainbow Refugees to discuss the findings of their report 'We Are Getting Hurt' which documents the impact of hate crime experienced by LGBTQ+ asylum seekers living in Contingency Accommodation in NI.

Following this I engaged with Mears Plc, which holds the Home Office contract to provide accommodation for people seeking asylum in NI, and senior TEO officials, who coordinate the devolved response to refugee and asylum seeker integration.

I was pleased to hear that Mears has commenced work to consider what practical measures could be put in place to better protect LGBTQ+ asylum seekers from hate-based attacks, and I look forward to the Executive Refugee Integration Strategy being published.

I will continue to engage with relevant NGOs, statutory agencies and Commissioners in GB to seek further improvements to how LGBTQ+ asylum seekers are supported and protected.

DUTY OF CANDOUR

I have engaged with a number of victims who have raised the issue of a lack of candour by public servants in investigations after something has gone wrong. I am a proponent of a statutory duty of candour to apply to all public servants and have engaged with the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health, the Department of Finance and individual MLA's to encourage them to introduce such a duty in Northern Ireland.

Such a duty should not be seen as attempting to punish individuals, but instead make sure that public servants are open and honest, to make sure that lessons are learned when something goes wrong to prevent similar issues happening again in the future.

OPERATION ENCOMPASS AND CJSM

Throughout this year I have worked with the Department of Education on an idea to improve how Operation Encompass works in Northern Ireland.

Operation Encompass aims to help children who have been present in homes where domestic abuse has taken place by letting their schools know about the incident.

This has been a successful operation and the benefits are clear. Teachers are better placed to provide important support when they know what the children in their care have experienced.

However one issue identified was that police officers wouldn't have time to make all the calls they needed to early in the morning, so that teachers were sometimes not being informed until late morning or early afternoon. This obviously makes the intervention less helpful.

To date I have been frustrated with progress in this field. What seems like a relatively straightforward, commonly used email system is proving difficult to use for schools in Northern Ireland.

I am pleased to note that a pilot is due in early 2025 and have renewed my call for PSNI and Education Authority to proceed at pace.



The Commissioner Designate
with Education Minister Paul Givan MLA.

CONSULTATIONS

In 2024/25, my office responded to 15 public consultations on a range of issues. The purpose of responding to public consultations from statutory agencies is to ensure my office can represent the views of victims when government legislation, strategy or policy is being developed and/or amended.

My office responded to the following consultations in 2024/25;

Department of Justice

Victim and Witness Strategy Call for Views November 2024

Northern Ireland Policing Board

Policing Plan 2025-2030

PSNI

Race and Ethnicity Action Plan

Department of Justice

Consultation on Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill

OFCOM

Protecting Children from Harms Online

Department of Justice

Call for Views on Pre-Trial Representation and Disclosure Legislation

Department of the Economy

Safe Leave Consultation

The Executive Office

Consultation on Draft Programme for Government

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Community Safety Strategy Consultation

TEO

TEO Racial Equality Strategy call for views

DoJ

DoJ Stakeholder survey on victim experience of domestic abuse offence

TEO

TEO Programme for Government EQIA

DoH

Department of Health: Being Open Framework & Duty of Candour

DoJ

Legal Aid Remuneration

DoJ

Enabling Access to Justice Delivery Plan

All responses have been published on the [CVOCNI website](#).

Raising awareness of the role of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime, the Victims Charter and the issues important to victims of crime has been a key ambition of my office since it was founded in 2022.

One of my key strategic objectives is;



That our politicians, government departments and the wider public have greater awareness of the needs and concerns of victims and use this to effect positive change:

- a. *Represent the voice of victims and victims groups in the public arena;*
- b. *Advise and make recommendations to Ministers and government on systemic issues impacting on victims of crime.”*

Over the course of 2024/25, I have achieved this objective through traditional media, social media and through directly engaging with elected representatives and other key stakeholders to advocate on key issues.



The Commissioner Designate at the NSPCC Young Witness Event in December 2024.



The Commissioner Designate with Justice Minister Naomi Long MLA.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

In 2024/25, I regularly appeared across various media platforms commenting on a range of issues across TV, radio, print and online publications.

I have proactively engaged with media, for example in publicising the publication of the results of the victim survey, VPS report and the report into IPV.

I also took part in a major roundtable discussion hosted by Public Affairs magazine Agenda NI. This discussion focused on improving the experience of children in family courts who have experienced domestic abuse in the household.

I am honoured to be a trusted voice, regularly asked to comment on important issues e.g. the impact of the industrial action of the Criminal Bar Association on victims of crime and I also used the media to promote the office’s second survey launched in 2024.



The Commissioner Designate at the launch of the Children's Sexual Offences Legal Advisor service.

SOCIAL MEDIA

I have used social media to regularly comment on issues key to victims and victims groups throughout 2024/25. My office also used Facebook advertising to promote the second victims survey.



The Commissioner Designate at the launch of research into male experience of IPV with Professor Cherie Armour, Health Minister Mike Nesbitt, Justice Minister Naomi Long and Dr Eric Skipol.



The Commissioner Designate at the Hate Crime Conference in Craigavon in October 2024.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

I have regularly engaged with decision makers including elected representatives across all levels of government, the judiciary and others to make recommendations on the systemic issues impacting on victims of crime.

With the restoration of the NI Executive in February 2024, my focus has been on influencing policy at Stormont.

I have corresponded with Ministers and MLAs over the course of the year. I have been pleased to address the Justice Committee on the results of the inaugural victim survey and the Justice Bill.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BOARD

This year was the first year I started attending the Criminal Justice Board (CJB). The CJB is a meeting of the senior most individuals in our criminal justice system, bringing together the Justice Minister, the Lady Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the head of Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and the Chief Constable.

For me it has always been a key priority that victim's voices are represented at such an important venue.

My attendance at CJB has been on a trial basis, however I have found the engagements positive and I am hopeful that whoever occupies this post will continue to have a seat at that important table and continue to amplify victim's voices where it is so important that they are heard.



The Commissioner Designate at her first meeting of the Criminal Justice Board with DoJ Permanent Secretary Hugh Widdis, Chief Constable Jon Butcher, Director of Public Prosecutions Stephen Herron, Justice Minister Naomi Long, Lady Chief Justice Dame Siobhan Keegan, Sean Holland from DoJ and head of NICTS Glyn Capper.



The Commissioner Designate meeting Junior Ministers Aislinn Reilly MLA and Pam Cameron MLA.

MONITORING COMPLIANCE

Compliance monitoring with the victim charter is a key priority for me. Work has progressed in this area in partnership with the Victims & Witness Branch within DoJ in the final quarter of the year. My office has been working closely with DoJ in establishing a dedicated working group of criminal justice stakeholders to progress this.

The main purpose of the working group is to work towards developing a dataset that can measure organisations' compliance with the key entitlements in the Victim Charter. The group is also asked to develop a comparable victim dataset that can

effectively capture victims' experiences throughout the criminal justice process. Membership includes my office, all relevant criminal justice agencies plus Victim Support NI and NSPCC.

To date, my office has developed and shared key performance metrics aligned to the entitlements in the Victim Charter against which each criminal justice agency should be measured. Each agency has been tasked with exploring available data as well as identifying any gaps where data may not currently exist and that would require a mechanism to be developed to collect this data.

FINANCE

My office remains within the accounting boundary of DoJ and reports on monthly spend to the Victim and Witness sponsorship branch.

2024-25 Budget.

My office's budget allocation for 2024-25 was £401,000.

This was supplemented by £132,958 from the Victims of Crime Fund and £10,000 from the Violence Against the Person Branch for a total of £543,958 for the year.



The Commissioner Designate with then Health Minister Robin Swann.

THE YEAR AHEAD

As we enter a new financial year, I remain committed to advancing the rights and well-being of all victims of crime. I have taken the decision to extend my 2022-2025 strategy by one year with our priorities shaped by the same vision and strategic

objectives. Informed by engagement with victims and other key stakeholders, and the key pieces of work identified in this document already, the following areas will remain key areas of focus for 2025-26.

Family Courts

In 2025 I will publish the findings of research carried out by QUB academics into the experience of victims of domestic abuse in our family courts and my own recommendations for reform. In 2025/26 one of the most important roles I will undoubtedly have is championing those recommendations to try and drive us towards a family court system that is truly child-centred and responsive to the needs of victims of domestic abuse.

Promoting statutory footing for the Commissioner's Office

The Justice Minister has indicated that the office will be placed on a statutory footing via the Victims and Witnesses Bill due to be introduced in 2026. This office will have an important role to play in informing future debates and we will continue to advise decision makers on how to best support the office when it is placed on statutory footing.

Sentencing

In the autumn of 2025, the Minister of Justice will introduce a Sentencing Bill to the Assembly. The issue of sentencing is something that is the subject of considerable discourse. I want to make sure that when the debate is taking place about this Bill and the broader issues that victims voices are amplified and help to support changes creating better understanding, transparency and effectiveness when it comes to sentencing.

Engaging with victims and representatives to identify key issues

Continuing my commitment to victim-centred work, I will actively engage with victims and their representatives to identify key issues facing victims of all crimes. My role is to amplify the voices of victims of crime and I will continue to make sure those voices are at the heart of everything we do.

Through research, engagement, collaboration and the promotion of victims' rights, I hope my office can continue to make a lasting impact on those affected by crime.







COMMISSIONER
**FOR VICTIMS
OF CRIME**