

Department of Finance

Consultation on the Draft Budget 2026- 2029/30

**Response from the Commissioner Designate
for Victims of Crime for Northern Ireland**

3 March 2026

The Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime welcomes the opportunity to provide views on the Draft Budget 2026–2029/30. The Commissioner Designate recognises the significant fiscal constraints outlined by the Department of Finance and appreciates the difficult choices facing the Executive in balancing competing pressures across public services. Within this environment, the Commissioner Designate is encouraged by the Executive's continued prioritisation of areas that directly impact victims of crime, including allocations for HIA, Victims and Truth Recovery, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), Ending Paramilitarism and PSNI workforce recovery. These commitments reflect statutory duties to protect victims, improve justice outcomes, and uphold rights.

It is essential however that we recognise that the needs and associated resource needs for victims is cross cutting with health, justice, housing, education and social care all playing a key part. Whilst commitments are signalled through safer communities and EVAWG funding, the needs of victims, and the wider system responsibilities associated with meeting those needs, remain under prioritised and largely invisible in the current budget architecture. She would wish to see clear, victim specific outcomes embedded in future budgeting and strategic frameworks so that victims' needs are recognised and addressed more consistently.

Remit

The Office of the Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime has a mandate to represent and advocate for the needs and interests of victims of crime, to promote compliance with the statutory Victim Charter, and to drive system-wide improvement in how victims experience the justice process. The Commissioner Designate therefore welcomes budgetary decisions that strengthen victim safety, access to justice, and public confidence.

Priority areas for investment

Given the Commissioner Designate's role, continued prioritisation of the following areas is essential:

- **Victim Support and Advocacy Services.** Funding for victim support bodies, including those delivering the Victim Charter commitments, should be protected. Without firm protection and sustainable funding, victims' services risk being treated as discretionary rather than essential which undermines our commitment to trauma informed practice and the longer term recovery needs of victims of crime.

- **Justice system organisations responsible for case progression.** Given the rising complexity of caseloads across the system, including growth in domestic and sexual offence cases, sustained resourcing for the organisations responsible for managing, preparing, and progressing cases is essential to reducing delays. As an office working to drive system wide improvement and ensure victims' perspectives are embedded in those improvements, the Commissioner Designate emphasises that timely, well-resourced case progression is critical to securing better outcomes for victims.
- **PSNI workforce recovery.** Ensuring the organisation has sufficient operational capacity is essential to maintaining public safety and supporting effective victim engagement.
- **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG).** Funding should be deployed on a strategic, multi-year basis to ensure sustainable delivery and maximum impact.
- **Ending Paramilitarism and Organised Crime.** Paramilitary groups continue to exert pressure and cause harm in some communities, and this has a direct impact on victims' safety and confidence in engaging with the justice system. Ongoing funding helps create the conditions in which people feel safer coming forward.

Invest to save opportunities

The Commissioner Designate emphasises that investment in victim focused initiatives should be viewed as invest to save measures. When victims are well supported and able to sustain engagement with the justice process, cases progress more efficiently, reducing avoidable delay and minimising costs associated with inefficiencies and attrition.

In this regard, the Commissioner Designate recommends that transformation funding be directed toward projects capable of delivering high system wide impact at comparatively low cost. The draft Budget document itself highlights the significant potential of the proposed Victim Needs Assessment Service, referenced in the section on the Public Prosecution Service, noting that although the service has been designed, it has not progressed due to a lack of a funding commitment. Costed at approximately £0.5 million, and notwithstanding adjustments needed to reflect inflation, this represents a modest investment which would yield significant benefits, including earlier identification of need, improved victim engagement, smoother case

progression, reduced attrition, better justice outcomes, and ultimately safer communities.

Similarly, the Commissioner Designate supports transformation initiatives designed to reduce delay and court costs. The CVOC office is leading a cross-departmental Task and Finish Working Group to scope and cost a family court pilot (Pathfinder inspired and adapted for NI) focused on child contact/residence cases where domestic abuse is a feature. The pilot will aim to streamline case progression and reduce unnecessary hearings while prioritising child safety, trauma informed practice, and meaningful participation.

Cost recovery considerations

The Commissioner Designate supports proportionate cost recovery mechanisms where they do not disadvantage victims of crime. Any system of cost recovery must never apply to victim facing services, such as support, court attendance assistance, safety planning, or restorative processes. In considering revenue raising opportunities, the Executive may also wish to explore an increase in the offender levy as a mechanism for generating additional, ring fenced funding for victim support. The levy could be uplifted at sentencing and earmarked for victim services, creating a modest but reliable recurring revenue source.

The Commissioner Designate remains available to engage further as the final Budget is developed. Her office can be contacted via the details below:

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